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THE CHILD SAMUEL

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THE GOSPEL OF THE CHILDHOOD :

A PRACTICAL AND DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY ON
THE SINGLE INCIDENT OF OUR BLESSED LORD'S
CHILDHOOD (ST. LUKE ii. 41 to the end.)

Square 16mo, 5s.

THE CHILD SAMUEL

A practical and devotional Commentary on the Birth and
Childhood of the Prophet Samuel

AS RECORDED IN

I SAMUEL I.; II. 1-27; III.

Bible. O. T. I. Samuel I-III
English

DESIGNED AS

A HELP TO MEDITATION ON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS

BY

EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN, D.D.

DEAN OF NORWICH.

New York

POTT, YOUNG, AND COMPANY

COOPER UNION, FOURTH AVENUE

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TO

THE REVEREND HENRY SYMONDS, M.A.,

RECTOR OF TIVETSHALL,

FORMERLY FOR MANY YEARS

PRECENTOR OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL,

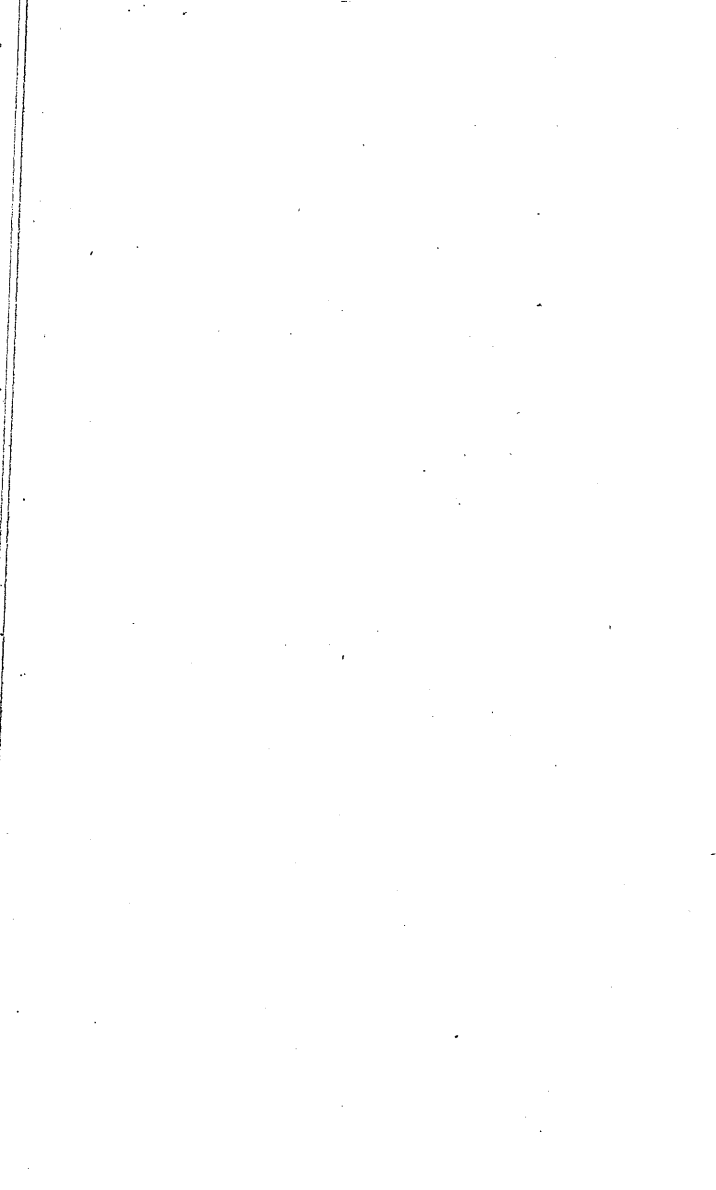
AN OLD AND TRIED FRIEND,

AND A VALUED FELLOW-LABOURER,

This Work is Inscribed

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF AFFECTION

AND ESTEEM.



PREFATORY LETTER.

THE DEANERY, NORWICH,
February 21, 1876.

MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,

I value your kind permission to associate your name with the present little volume, as a memento of many happy and (to myself) profitable hours spent together in work, partly official and connected with our Cathedral, and partly literary.

The official work has alas! ceased; but the interest which you took in our Choristers, while you presided over them, assures me that you will regard favourably any attempt to induce them to become, and to teach them how to become, devout students of Holy Scripture. Not that this work is designed exclusively for Choristers, though the several Chapters, as

originally delivered in the form of short sermons, were intended chiefly for them, and though I have not thought it necessary, in re-writing and altering the addresses, to expunge all traces of their original design. I have pursued the larger aim, which I set before me in *The Gospel of the Childhood*, of instructing boys and girls generally, whether before or after Confirmation, how to bring their mind and heart in contact with those Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us 'wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' With them, as with their elders, the mere reading of the Bible is too often substituted for thinking over it on their knees, and working its precious truths by prayer and meditation into the texture of their character. I have aimed in this book at making the meditations rather more advanced than in *The Gospel of the Childhood*, so as to provide for a later age. Many as are the defects in the execution, I know you will approve of the design.

And as for our literary work, does this too all lie in the past? I rejoice to think that very much of it will lie (if we are spared, and God permit) in the future; and that *The Sermons and Letters of Herbert de Losinga* will still, if all be well, furnish the welcome excuse for many a meeting, and many a research into goodly folios, and many a revising of proof-sheets, relieved (as such work needs to be) by sprightly chat and sprightlier jokes. In clearing this little book off my hands (and this again is a link of association between it and you), I have removed something which stops the way against the progress of the *magnum opus*, in which we are still fellow-labourers.

Ever yours affectionately,

E. M. GOULBURN.



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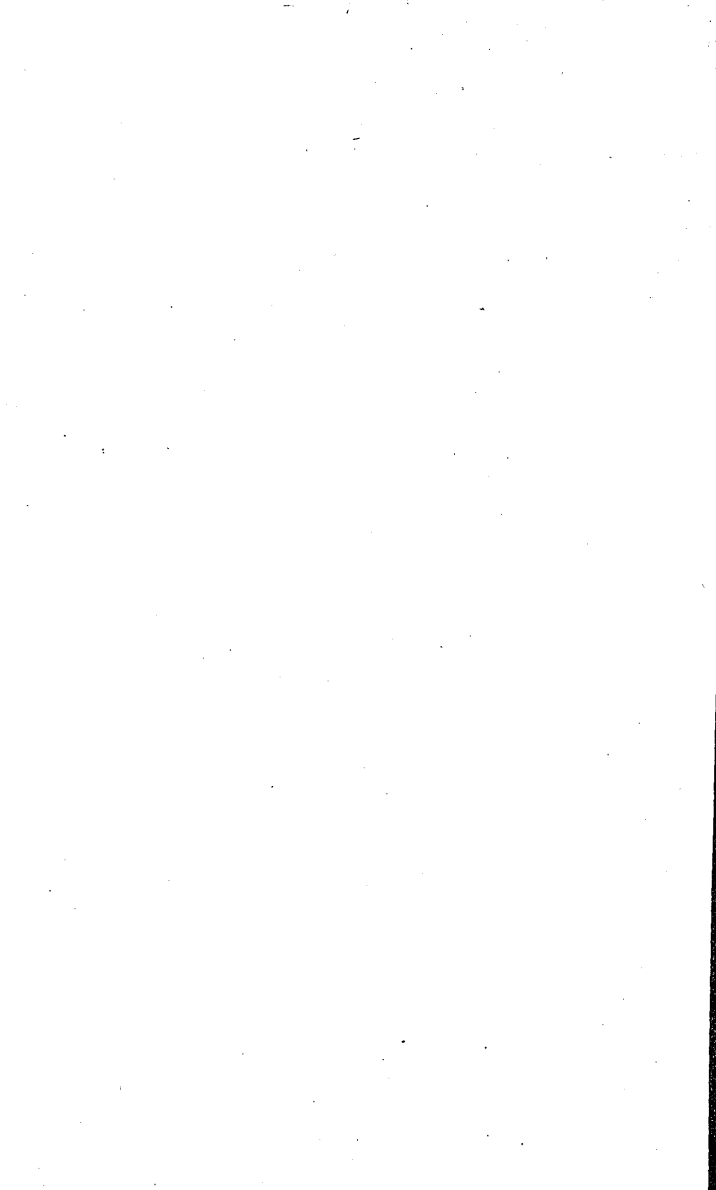
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Instructions

HOW TO BEGIN AND CONCLUDE THE STUDY OF THIS BOOK, WHICH YOU ARE REQUESTED TO READ THROUGH CAREFULLY.

Before you begin a Chapter of this book, kneel down, and—

First; Call to mind that you are in the presence of Almighty God, whose eye is resting upon your heart. You may help yourself to do this by thinking that, if it pleased God to rend the veil of outward and bodily things which hangs before your eyes, and which hides from you things spiritual and eternal, you might see what Jacob saw, the Lord looking down upon you from heaven, and angels travelling on a ladder of light to carry your prayers and praises upwards to Him, and messages of mercy and peace downward to you, or even what St. Stephen saw, the Lord Jesus standing at God's right hand, ready to offer up your prayers, and to intercede for you with His Father, and ready also to lift up His pierced hands over you, and bless you when you have concluded your meditation. You may also use these words of Holy Scripture, as a help to you in making the Presence of God a reality: 'Thou God seest me. . . . Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?' (Gen. xvi. 13); 'Surely the Lord is in this place' (Gen. xxviii. 16); 'Thou art about my path, and about my bed: and spiest out all my ways. . . . Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit: or whither shall I go then from thy presence?' (Ps. cxxxix. 2, 6. P.B.V.)

Secondly; Still continuing on your knees, say very reverently and devoutly one or more of these Collects or prayers:—

I.

COLLECT FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

II.

MERCIFUL Lord, I beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon my mind, that I being enlightened by the doctrines of thy holy Word may so walk in the light of thy truth, that I may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

III.

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to me thy humble servant, that by thy holy inspiration I may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

IV.

O LORD Jesu Christ, the heavenly Sower, who sowest the Word, bless me thy servant, I beseech thee, and sow the seed of eternal life in my heart; that whatsoever in thy holy Word I shall profitably learn, I may in deed fulfil the same. Look, O Lord, mercifully upon me from heaven, and bless me. Let thy fatherly hand ever be over me; let thy Holy Spirit ever be with me; and so lead me day by day both in the knowledge and obedience of thy Word, that in the end I may obtain everlasting life, through thy mercy and merits, who livest and reignest

with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

V.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

VI.

THAT it may please thee to give to me and to all thy people increase of grace to hear meekly thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; I beseech thee to hear me, good Lord.

VII.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. *Ps. cxix. 18.*

O Lord Jesus Christ, open thou mine understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures. *See S. Luke xxiv. 45.*

O Spirit of truth, guide me into all truth. *See S. John xvi. 13.*

Take away the veil from my heart, O Lord, when I read the Scriptures. *See 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16.*

OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION; BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. AMEN.

Then, rising from your knees, and sitting (but not in an indolent or slovenly attitude), or, if you prefer it,

kneeling still, read one of these Chapters, or part of one of them, NOT CARING TO READ MUCH, BUT READING A LITTLE THOROUGHLY, AND IN SUCH A MANNER THAT IT MAY SINK INTO YOUR MIND, and taking the trouble to look out the references in your Bible, and to read them attentively. A LITTLE WELL STUDIED IS MUCH MORE PROFITABLE THAN A GREAT MANY PAGES ONLY GLANCED THROUGH. Do not end your reading without making some very short prayer in your own words on what you have read,—the simpler the better,—like this for example :—

‘ O Lord, let it always be a delight to me to go up to thy house of prayer to worship thee ;’ *or,*

‘ O Lord, make me fit now for the work to which it shall please thee to call me by-and-by ;’ *or,*

‘ O Lord, let me never be ashamed or afraid to own myself thy servant ;’ *or,*

‘ O Lord, deliver and preserve me from indolence, and greediness, and from all youthful lusts, and make me pure in heart, that I may see thee my God ;’ *or,*

‘ O Lord, let me not be led away from the narrow path of thy commandments by bad example, or the influence of ungodly people.’

The prayer, whatever it is, should be drawn from, and founded upon, what you have been reading.

Perhaps it will serve to fix it in your mind, if you write it down. Anyhow, settle what it is to be before you close the book. And then, falling again upon your knees, offer that petition to God with great earnestness as the fruit of your meditation ; and repeat it during the day at odd moments, and again when you say your prayers at night.

Then you may conclude your devotions by saying one of these Psalms (after first reading the short heading of it), and one or more of the prayers which follow the Psalms, closing all with the Lord’s Prayer.

PSALM I.

The character of one, who has been from his youth a servant of God, is described in this Psalm. Young Samuel was of such a character; for he stood fast against bad example (v. 1); grew in grace and knowledge (v. 3); was prospered in what he took in hand (v. 4); and was established to be a prophet of the Lord, unlike Eli's ungodly sons, who were scattered away like chaff from the face of the earth (v. 5).

BLESSED is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners: and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful.

2. But his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in his law will he exercise himself day and night.

3. And he shall be like a tree planted by the water-side: that will bring forth his fruit in due season.

4. His leaf also shall not wither: and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.

5. As for the ungodly, it is not so with them: but they are like the chaff, which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth.

6. Therefore the ungodly shall not be able to stand in the judgement: neither the sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

7. But the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: and the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

PSALM VIII.

Out of the mouth of the child Samuel God ordained strength (v. 2); making him a great prophet, and the founder of a line of prophets, and stooping from heaven

to visit him (v. 4), and to converse with him, and giving him dominion over the works of His hands by appointing him to be the founder of the monarchy of Israel, to set up kings and put down kings. For both Saul and David were anointed king by Samuel.

O LORD our Governour, how excellent is thy Name in all the world : thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens !

2. Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy, and the avenger.

3. For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.

4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?

5. Thou madest him lower than the angels : to crown him with glory and worship.

6. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands : and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet ;

7. All sheep and oxen : yea, and the beasts of the field ;

8. The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea : and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas.

9. O Lord our Governour : how excellent is thy Name in all the world !

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM XVI.

This Psalm applies chiefly, as St. Peter teaches us in his first sermon (Acts ii. 25-32), to our Lord Jesus Christ, whose soul was not left in the place of departed spirits, nor did His most sacred body see corruption ; for He rose the third day from the dead, never more to die. But it

has a secondary application to the people of God, and to Samuel among the number. He, as a Levite, had no inheritance in the land of promise (see Num. xviii. 24, and Deut. x. 9); but the Lord was the portion of his inheritance, and of his cup (v. 6). Moreover God gave him warning of what He was about to do to Eli and his house, and solemnly instructed him in the night season (v. 8).

PRESERVE me, O God : for in thee have I put my trust.

2. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord : Thou art my God, my goods are nothing unto thee.

3. All my delight is upon the saints, that are in the earth : and upon such as excel in virtue.

4. But they that run after another god : shall have great trouble.

5. Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer : neither make mention of their names within my lips.

6. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup : thou shalt maintain my lot.

7. The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground : yea, I have a goodly heritage.

8. I will thank the Lord for giving me warning : my reins also chasten me in the night-season.

9. I have set God always before me : for he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall.

10. Wherefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced : my flesh also shall rest in hope.

11. For why? thou shalt not leave my soul in hell : neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.

12. Thou shalt shew me the path of life ; in thy presence is the fulness of joy : and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM XVII.

This Psalm expresses the sentiments of those servants of God, who, like Samuel, while those around them do wrong, keep themselves from the ways of the destroyer (v. 4), and are delivered from the evil world, and from the men which have their portion in this life (v. 14). God keeps such people as the apple of His eye (v. 8), and proves and visits their heart in the night-season (v. 3).

HEAR the right, O Lord, consider my complaint :
and hearken unto my prayer, that goeth not out of
feigned lips.

2. Let my sentence come forth from thy presence : and
let thine eyes look upon the thing that is equal.

3. Thou hast proved and visited mine heart in the
night-season ; thou hast tried me, and shalt find no
wickedness in me : for I am utterly purposed that my
mouth shall not offend.

4. Because of men's works, that are done against the
words of thy lips : I have kept me from the ways of the
destroyer.

5. O hold thou up my goings in thy paths : that my
footsteps slip not.

6. I have called upon thee, O God, for thou shalt hear
me : incline thine ear to me, and hearken unto my
words.

7. Shew thy marvellous loving-kindness, thou that art
the Saviour of them which put their trust in thee : from
such as resist thy right hand.

8. Keep me as the apple of an eye : hide me under the
shadow of thy wings,

9. From the ungodly that trouble me : mine enemies
compass me round about to take away my soul.

10. They are inclosed in their own fat : and their mouth
speaketh proud things.

11. They lie waiting in our way on every side : turning
their eyes down to the ground ;

12. Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey : and as it were a lion's whelp, lurking in secret places.

13. Up, Lord, disappoint him, and cast him down : deliver my soul from the ungodly, which is a sword of thine ;

14. From the men of thy hand, O Lord, from the men, I say, and from the evil world : which have their portion in this life, whose bellies thou fillest with thy hid treasure.

15. They have children at their desire : and leave the rest of their substance for their babes.

16. But as for me, I will behold thy presence in righteousness : and when I awake up after thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM LXXXIV.

Samuel dwelt in God's house (v. 4) in early childhood ; and (being a Korahite) was a door-keeper there (v. 11) ; and no doubt took warning from the wickedness and punishment of his ancestor Korah, who was in his tent when the earth opened her mouth and swallowed him up (v. 11, and see Num. xvi. 26, 27). When the ark of God was taken, and the religious establishment at Shiloh, where Samuel had been bred, was broken up, then perhaps birds may have made their nests in the deserted and desolated courts of God's house (v. 3). So that this Psalm will apply very well to the circumstances of Samuel, and to his love for the sanctuary.

○ HOW amiable are thy dwellings : thou Lord of hosts !

2. My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

3. Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the

swallow a nest where she may lay her young : even thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

4. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house : they will be always praising thee.

5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee : in whose heart are thy ways.

6. Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well : and the pools are filled with water.

7. They will go from strength to strength : and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion.

8. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer : hearken, O God of Jacob.

9. Behold, O God our defender : and look upon the face of thine Anointed.

10. For one day in thy courts : is better than a thousand.

11. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God : than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.

12. For the Lord God is a light and defence : the Lord will give grace and worship, and no good thing shall he withhold from them that live a godly life.

13. O Lord God of hosts : blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM LXXXIX. 20, to end of 36.

It was Samuel who anointed David king (1 Sam. xvi. 13), and therefore this Psalm, which speaks of the anointing of David, and of the glorious promises made to him, may be appropriately recited in connexion with the history of Samuel.

THOU spakest sometime in visions unto thy saints, and saidst : I have laid help upon one that is mighty ; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.

21. I have found David my servant : with my holy oil have I anointed him.

22. My hand shall hold him fast : and my arm shall strengthen him.

23. The enemy shall not be able to do him violence : the son of wickedness shall not hurt him.

24. I will smite down his foes before his face : and plague them that hate him.

25. My truth also and my mercy shall be with him : and in my Name shall his horn be exalted.

26. I will set his dominion also in the sea : and his right hand in the floods.

27. He shall call me, Thou art my Father : my God, and my strong salvation.

28. And I will make him my first-born : higher than the kings of the earth.

29. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore : and my covenant shall stand fast with him.

30. His seed also will I make to endure for ever : and his throne as the days of heaven.

31. But if his children forsake my law : and walk not in my judgements ;

32. If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments : I will visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges.

33. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him : nor suffer my truth to fail.

34. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips : I have sworn once by my holiness, that I will not fail David.

35. His seed shall endure for ever : and his seat is like as the sun before me.

36. He shall stand fast for evermore as the moon : and as the faithful witness in heaven.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM XCIX.

Samuel is mentioned in this Psalm (v. 6) as one of those who called upon God's name, that is, who interceded with God for Israel (see I Sam. vii. 9; I Sam. xii. 19, 23; Jeremiah xv. 1); and also as one of those children of God who were 'punished' by Him (v. 8) ('what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?' Heb. xii. 7.) It was Samuel's over-leniency to his sons which moved the people to reject his administration altogether, and to desire a king (I Sam. viii. 1-7).

THE Lord is King, be the people never so impatient :
he sitteth between the cherubims, be the earth never so unquiet.

2. The Lord is great in Sion : and high above all people.

3. They shall give thanks unto thy Name : which is great, wonderful, and holy.

4. The King's power loveth judgement ; thou hast prepared equity : thou hast executed judgement and righteousness in Jacob.

5. O magnify the Lord our God : and fall down before his footstool, for he is holy.

6. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among such as call upon his Name : these called upon the Lord, and he heard them.

7. He spake unto them out of the cloudy pillar : for they kept his testimonies, and the law that he gave them.

8. Thou heardest them, O Lord our God : thou forgavest them, O God, and punishedst their own inventions.

9. O magnify the Lord our God, and worship him upon his holy hill : for the Lord our God is holy.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM CXIX. 9-16.

This passage may be applied to Samuel, who, as a young man, cleansed his way by ruling himself after God's word (v. 9), and was made a great prophet, and commissioned to tell with his lips the judgements of God's mouth (v. 13).

WHEREWITHAL shall a young man cleanse his way : even by ruling himself after thy word.

10. With my whole heart have I sought thee : O let me not go wrong out of thy commandments.

11. Thy words have I hid within my heart : that I should not sin against thee.

12. Blessed art thou, O Lord : O teach me thy statutes.

13. With my lips have I been telling : of all the judgements of thy mouth.

14. I have had as great delight in the way of thy testimonies : as in all manner of riches.

15. I will talk of thy commandments : and have respect unto thy ways.

16. My delight shall be in thy statutes : and I will not forget thy word.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM CXIX. 41-48.

Samuel was one of those who spoke of God's testimonies even before kings (v. 46) with holy boldness, showing all reverence to Saul, and yet announcing to him God's will and word with all faithfulness (1 Sam. ix. 23, 24, and x. 1, 24, and xiii. 13, 14, and xv. 17-32).

LET thy loving mercy come also unto me, O Lord : even thy salvation, according unto thy word.

42. So shall I make answer unto my blasphemers : for my trust is in thy word.

43. O take not the word of thy truth utterly out of my mouth : for my hope is in thy judgments.

44. So shall I always keep thy law : yea, for ever and ever.

45. And I will walk at liberty : for I seek thy commandments.

46. I will speak of thy testimonies also, even before kings : and will not be ashamed.

47. And my delight shall be in thy commandments : which I have loved.

48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved : and my study shall be in thy statutes.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM CXIX. 97-104.

Though more especially applicable to our Blessed Saviour among the doctors in the Temple, this Psalm will apply also to young Samuel, who had more understanding than those wicked priests who held the position of his teachers (v. 99), and was wiser even than aged Eli, because he kept God's commandments (v. 100).

LORD, what love have I unto thy law : all the day long is my study in it.

98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies : for they are ever with me.

99. I have more understanding than my teachers : for thy testimonies are my study.

100. I am wiser than the aged : because I keep thy commandments.

101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way : that I may keep thy word.

102. I have not shrunk from thy judgements : for thou teachest me.

103. O how sweet are thy words unto my throat : yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth.

104. Through thy commandments I get understanding : therefore I hate all evil ways.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM CXXXII.

Samuel was very much connected with the early troubles of David (1 Sam. xix. 18), whom he anointed king (1 Sam. xvi. 1, 13), though he did not live to see him crowned (2 Sam. v. 3). This Psalm therefore, which speaks of David's bringing up the ark of God into the tabernacle which he had pitched for it (v. 7, 8, 9 ; 2 Sam. vi. 15, 17), and also speaks prophetically of Messiah, the true ark of the Covenant, who tabernacled in our flesh, is appropriate to the history of Samuel.

LORD, remember David : and all his trouble ;

2. How he swore unto the Lord : and vowed a vow unto the Almighty God of Jacob ;

3. I will not come within the tabernacle of mine house : nor climb up into my bed ;

4. I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep, nor mine eyelids to slumber : neither the temples of my head to take any rest ;

5. Until I find out a place for the temple of the Lord : an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.

6. Lo, we heard of the same at Ephrata : and found it in the wood.

7. We will go into his tabernacle : and fall low on our knees before his footstool.

8. Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place : thou, and the ark of thy strength.

9. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness : and let thy saints sing with joyfulness.

10. For thy servant David's sake : turn not away the presence of thine Anointed.

11. The Lord hath made a faithful oath unto David : and he shall not shrink from it ;

12. Of the fruit of thy body : shall I set upon thy seat.

13. If thy children will keep my covenant, and my testimonies that I shall learn them : their children also shall sit upon thy seat for evermore.

14. For the Lord hath chosen Sion to be an habitation for himself : he hath longed for her.

15. This shall be my rest for ever : here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein.

16. I will bless her victuals with increase : and will satisfy her poor with bread.

17. I will deck her priests with health : and her saints shall rejoice and sing.

18. There shall I make the horn of David to flourish : I have ordained a lantern for mine Anointed.

19. As for his enemies, I shall clothe them with shame : but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost ;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

PSALM CXXXIV.

This short Psalm contains the responses made by the Levites, as different parties of them passed one another on their nightly ministries in the temple. The 'standing' (in v. 2) was a word used of the ministry of Levites. The Lord had separated them 'to stand before the Lord

to minister unto him, and to bless in his name' (Deut. x. 8). Samuel was a Levite; and, though this Psalm is of a much later date, it is quite probable that the mutual salutations of the Levites in the house of God, which are embodied in this Psalm, may have been in use in his time.

BEHOLD now, praise the Lord: all ye servants of the Lord;

2. Ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord: even in the courts of the house of our God.

3. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary: and praise the Lord.

4. The Lord that made heaven and earth: give thee blessing out of Zion.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Concluding Prayers.

I.

O LORD Jesu Christ, who, that thou mightest leave an ensample unto the young, didst condescend to be subject unto thy parents after the flesh ; Grant me grace to order myself lowly and reverently to all who are set over me, so that following the steps of thy great humility, I may in my youth be conformed unto thine image, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, blessed for ever. Amen.

II.

O BLESSED Saviour, who, that thou mightest sanctify the period of growth, didst condescend to grow both in wisdom and in stature ; Make me swift to hear and inquire of my teachers, and to improve all the talents and opportunities which thou vouchsafest to me, so that, diligently seeking after wisdom, I may grow therein, and may find favour with thee and with man, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

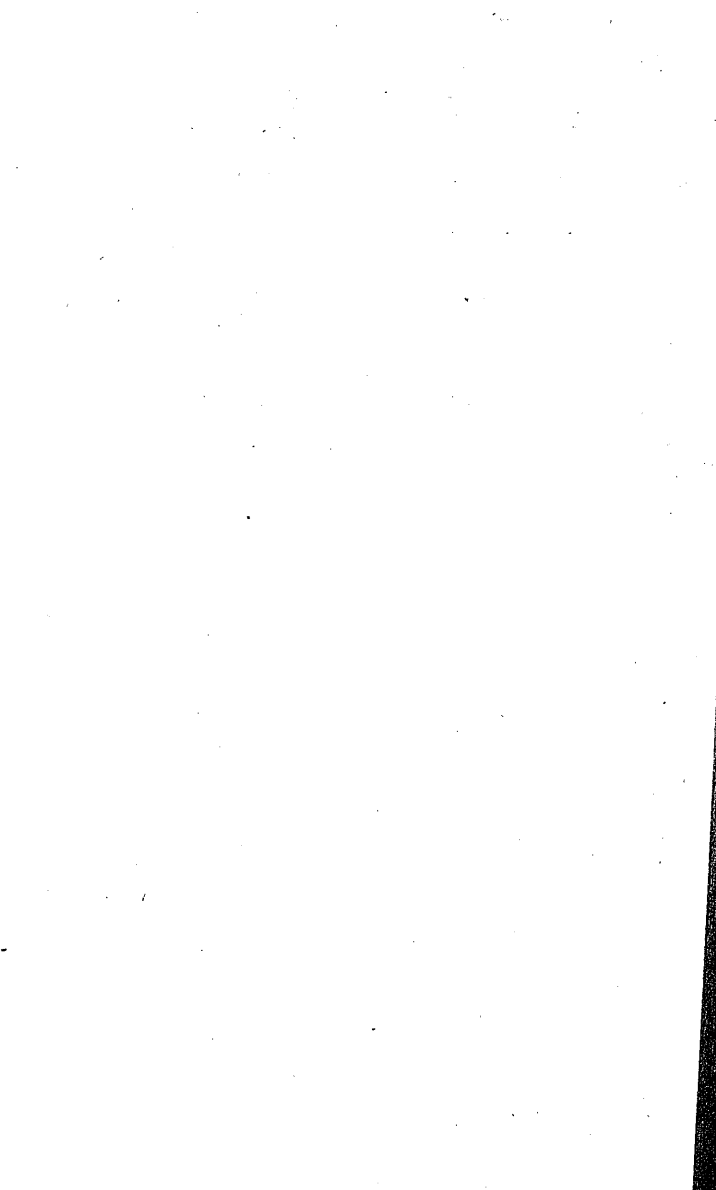
III.

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who didst cause the child Samuel to be dedicated unto thee in his early years, and didst call him to be a great prophet, and to

set up the throne of thy servant David ; Make me mindful, I beseech thee, that I too was sanctified in my infancy, and set apart to be thine by the washing of regeneration. May I daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit which was then given to me, and, remembering that thy vows are upon me, may I cleanse myself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in thy fear. Make known to me in thy own good time and way the calling in which thou wouldest have me to serve thee, and fit me for it now by enabling me diligently to improve all the talents and opportunities of learning and devotion which thou dost bestow upon me. So, when I render an account to thy well-beloved Son of the things done in the body, may I receive from him that blessing ; Well done, good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Grant this, I beseech thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION ; BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL : FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with my spirit. Amen.



CHAPTER I.

THAT WE OUGHT TO SEEK FOR CHRIST IN EVERY
PART OF SCRIPTURE.

ST. JOHN XV. 26.

He shall testify of me.

BEFORE we enter upon the story of the Prophet Samuel, we will make one general remark upon it. We find many things in Samuel's life which remind us of things in our blessed Lord's life. I do not say that Samuel was (what is usually called) a type of Christ. The type of Christ was David, whose kingdom Samuel was the means of setting up. But yet in the history of Samuel there are several striking resemblances to what we read about our blessed Lord. Let me mention some of them. Both Samuel and our Lord were born in an extraordinary manner,^a—not, indeed, in the same manner, but both of them in a manner out of the common course of nature.—Samuel, as soon as he was weaned, was taken up to the tabernacle and solemnly presented to God by his mother, with an offering of cattle, flour, and wine^b; and having been presented, he remained there, and ministered unto the Lord

^a 1 Sam. i. 5, 6. and S. Matt. i. 18. ^b 1 Sam. i. 24.

before Eli the priest.^c Our Lord, when He was only six weeks old, was “presented in the temple in substance of our flesh,” His parents bringing with Him an offering of a pair of turtle-doves.^d And He was to be, and is now, “a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle”^e (*i.e.* of God’s heavenly temple, which is but the screened and most sacred chamber of His Church), “which the Lord pitched, and not man.”—Samuel’s mother paid him a yearly visit in the tabernacle when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice,^f which reminds us of our Lord’s being found by His earthly parents in the temple when He was twelve years old, they having come up to attend the feast of the Passover, and He having remained behind after they had gone.^g—Again, Samuel’s prophesying to the aged Eli in the courts of the tabernacle^h reminds us of our Lord among the venerable doctors in the temple, astonishing them by His understanding and answers.ⁱ—Samuel was not, indeed, the first man who ever prophesied in God’s name (for we are told that God’s “holy prophets have been since the world began”^j), but the first of the regular succession of the prophets. And our Lord is the great Prophet of His Church, no less than her King and her Priest.—Samuel’s first prophecy, after the Lord had called him^k in the dead silence of the night, was directed against the wickedness of the priests. And our blessed Lord was always bearing testimony against the profligacy and hypocrisy of the chief priests and scribes among the Jews. It was “the chief priests and elders”

^c 1 Sam. ii. 11. ^d S. Luke ii. 24. ^e Heb. viii. 2. ^f 1 Sam. ii. 19.
^g S. Luke ii. 42, 43, 46. ^h 1 Sam. iii. 11, 18. ⁱ S. Luke ii. 46, 47.
^j S. Luke i. 70. ^k 1 Sam. iii. 11, 15.

who, galled by the faithful testimony which He had borne against them, "persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus."¹—Samuel, though not a priest, but only a Levite, yet took on him to exercise the priestly office by offering sacrifices.^m Our blessed Lord, though not of the line of Aaron, nor even of the tribe of Levi, is yet the great High Priestⁿ of His Church, who offered in His life the true burnt-offering, in His death the true sin-offering, and who now offers the sweet incense of His intercession.—Samuel it was who founded the kingdom of Israel; and our Lord it was who went about preaching that kingdom of heaven, of which Daniel had spoken as a kingdom to be set up by the God of heaven in the days of the Roman empire,^o and which should consume all other kingdoms, and stand for ever.—Samuel appeared again after his death, and prophesied, as it were, from the grave.^p Our Lord appeared again after *His* death, and foretold how St. Peter should die, and that St. John should live till He came again to destroy Jerusalem,^q and expounded the Scriptures to His disciples, and spake to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.^r—And shall I mention another curious, and I hope not fanciful, particular? Samuel's raiment is specially mentioned. His mother made him a little coat^s (like what Jacob made for Joseph), and brought it to him year by year, when he was a child. And when he grew up, he wore a mantle (perhaps also made by his mother), which was symbolical, and had a meaning in it; for when the Lord rejected Saul, on account

¹ S. Matt. xxvii. 20. ^m 1 Sam. vii. 9. ⁿ Heb. viii. 1, 2.
^o Dan. ii. 44. ^p 1 Sam. xxviii. 12-20; and Ecclus. xlvi. 20.
^q S. John xxi. 18-23. ^r S. Luke xxiv. 27; Acts i. 3. ^s 1 Sam. ii. 19; Gen. xxxvii. 3.

of his sparing Agag and the best of the Amalekite spoil, Samuel's mantle was torn by Saul's catching the skirt of it,^t as the prophet turned suddenly round to go away; and the tearing of it was explained to mean that God had torn away the kingdom from Saul. Our Lord, too, had a remarkable seamless coat^u (very possibly woven for Him by His mother, or by some other pious woman), which had a most solemn meaning in it. The soldiers who executed Him would not tear it, but cast lots for it whose it should be. This seamless coat or tunic was a symbol of the unity of Christ's Church, which should be "one body,"^v inhabited by "one Spirit," and animated by "one hope," having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in" us "all."

Now, supposing that the story of Samuel in the Old Testament and the story of our Lord in the Gospels were common histories, which had no connexion with one another, and were written without any reference to one another, everybody would say that these resemblances were purely accidental; and in that case, to see anything in Samuel's history like our Lord's would be a mere fancy and a piece of trifling. But the histories of the Bible are quite unlike other histories. Though written by different human authors, and at different periods of time, they were all written by the inspiration of one Spirit, and all with one design. The Holy Ghost, when He moved holy men of old to write the Scriptures, had this great design,—to bear witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His divine Person, of His true manhood, of His atonement, His righteousness, His example, His

^t 1 Sam. xv. 27, 28. ^u S. John xix. 23, 24. ^v Eph. iv. 4, 5, 6.

power to save. "He shall testify of me," said Christ. And this is what the Holy Ghost is doing in the whole of the Bible—testifying of Christ. In the books of the New Testament He tells us how Christ lived, and died, and rose again, and will one day come back; and explains how all this bears upon our hopes and duties. In the books of the Old Testament He testifies to Christ in the way of type and prophecy; and not only this, but throughout the narrative gives, if I may use so homely an expression, little bits of Christ, opens glimpses of what Christ would be like, of what He would do and what He would suffer, when He actually came. Samuel was a young boy, who had been born in an extraordinary manner, was presented to God in his early childhood, loved the tabernacle, and was reared in it, testified against the wickedness of the priests, stood first in the succession of the prophets, and set up the kingdom of Israel. There was One coming, and ever drawing nearer, in whom all these features of character and conduct should shine out with a beauty and brilliancy which should throw Samuel quite into the shade. I do not say that the human author of the books of Samuel (who was probably in part Samuel himself) knew this, or had it in his mind when he wrote; but I do say that the Holy Spirit, by whom the human writer spake, knew it, and must have had it in His mind, because He is the Spirit of prophecy, and "the testimony of *Jesus* is the spirit of prophecy^w;" because His great office among mankind and in the Church is, and ever has been, to bear witness to Christ. Let us be careful, then, in taking up the history of Samuel, that we do

^w Rev. xix. 10.

6 *That we ought to seek for Christ* [CHAP. I.

not regard it merely as a pretty and instructive story, full of good moral lessons ; but let us expect to find in it glimpses, and very bright glimpses, of our Saviour. The Holy Ghost had Christ in view—His mind was full of Christ—when He caused this history to be written. And we cannot profit by, or even rightly understand, the Scriptures, unless we read them in good measure with the mind of Him who moved the holy men to write them. If you wish to appreciate a piece of poetry, you must have a poetical mind ; you will only find fault with it, and even think it absurd, if you have not. And if you wish to appreciate God's inspired Book, you must read it under the teaching and guidance of God's own Spirit. Otherwise, if you read it merely as a curious piece of literature, interesting from its antiquity, or merely as an instructive story-book, you will find great difficulties and stumbling-blocks, and very likely join in some of those wretched cavils against the Scriptures which unbelievers make, and which in these sad days professing believers, and even professing divines, are found to join in. From all such profaneness God deliver us, by giving us His Spirit while we read, to teach us and to guide us into all the truth.

CHAPTER II.

THE PILGRIMAGE TO SHILOH.

I SAM. I. 1, 2, 3.

1. Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite :

2. And he had two wives ; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah : and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship, and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.

GREAT personages are prepared for before they arrive. Our blessed Lord, the greatest of all personages who ever appeared upon earth, was prepared for long before He came. As soon as ever our first parents fell, Almighty God began to make things ready for Christ's arrival, by foretelling that He should come and bruise the serpent's head.^a And from that moment all events were so ordered in the history of mankind as to make things ready for the great Advent. And some of God's more illustrious servants and instru-

^a Gen. iii. 15.

ments have been like our Lord in this respect, that they have been prepared for—not, indeed, as He was, from the beginning of all things, but for some little time before they appeared. Thus it was with Samson; thus it was with St. John the Baptist;^b and thus it was with Samuel. In the first nineteen verses of this chapter we are told of the circumstances which prepared the way for Samuel, which led up to his birth. These preparations were made at a holy season, and in a holy place. He was a child granted to a mother's earnest prayer, and this prayer she offered at the place of God's public worship, Shiloh, when she came up thither with her husband to offer their yearly sacrifice. These pilgrimages the men and boys among the Israelites were bidden in the law to make three times a year, at the great festivals.^c But the time of the Judges was a lawless and irregular time, and probably the custom then crept in of going up only once a year to worship at the tabernacle. And in some cases the women of the family would go with the men and boys, as they did in this case; and, as afterwards, in the Gospel narrative, we find the blessed Virgin going up yearly to Jerusalem with her husband, St. Joseph, to keep the feast of the Passover. These yearly journeys to the place of public worship were not without difficulties and dangers. The country had no regular roads through it, or, at all events, no roads like ours—nothing but tracks of caravans, or companies of travellers who had gone that way before. It was not rid of wild beasts. Wolves and hyænas prowled about at night, and lions had their lair in the jungle which lined part of the course of the Jordan. Then there

^b See Judges xiii. and S. Luke i. 5-24.

^c Deut. xvi. 16.

were robbers in the hill fastnesses, ever ready to pounce upon undefended travellers, and strip them of all they possessed, even to their clothes—a calamity which happened to the poor man in our Lord's parable, who was afterwards relieved by the good Samaritan. The land of Canaan was not, it is true, a very large country, but still it was large enough to make it a journey of more than one day from the remote parts of it to where the tabernacle or temple stood. For there was no such thing as fast travelling on the mules and asses, which were the usual conveyances, and which sometimes waded with difficulty across a ford when the streams were swollen with rains. Under these circumstances, friends and neighbours, in travelling to the place of worship, commonly made up a party for mutual protection and assistance, marching close together during the day, and pitching their tents and lighting their watch-fires in the same spot when they halted for the night. These pilgrimages of the Israelites to the place of God's worship ought to remind us of the pilgrimage on which we ourselves are, or ought to be, bound, and in which every day of our lives we ought to make some progress. We, too, are "going up" to God's heavenly temple, where the ministering priests are angels and saints, where the blessed Saviour is ever presenting on our behalf the one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice which He offered upon earth, and sending up for us the incense of His intercession, and where the courts of the temple echo night and day with songs of praise. We are going up thither through the wilderness of this world. There are great dangers and difficulties to be encountered on the road. Our spiritual enemies, the chief of them

called by St. Peter "a roaring lion," who "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,"^d and all of them compared by our Lord in His parable of the good Samaritan to thieves who strip and wound pilgrims, and leave them half dead,^e are ever prowling about, watching their opportunity to rob and pillage us, and to prevent our reaching our journey's end in safety. We have two great helps and comforts on our way. One is the society of people who are going the same road, who have the same hope before them of reaching the heavenly temple, who look up to the same Father, trust in the same Saviour, are under the influence of the same Sanctifier. If God has given to any of us right-minded Christian friends, it is the greatest boon He can give; for, indeed, He never intended us to travel heavenward by ourselves, but in company. The other help is the public worship of God upon earth, which is intended to keep ever fresh and alive in us the thought and desire of His heavenly worship—the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs which God's people sing in His house of prayer; the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which is there offered; and, above all, the memorial of Christ's sacrifice, which is there made, before God and man, in the Holy Communion, by joining in which memorial our souls are strengthened against the dangers, and refreshed amid the toils, of our pilgrimage. But even in this worship, so delightful, so refreshing, there are serious drawbacks, reminding us that here is not our rest; that God's temple upon earth is not what His heavenly temple will be; that in the Church there will be always, until the great day of final separation, error, sin, and evil

^d 1 Pet. v. 8.^e S. Luke x. 30.

marring the harmony of the worship she offers. Sweet were the songs of the ministering Levites, and fragrant was the cloud of incense which went up day by day from the courts of the tabernacle of Shiloh; but alas! there was a great scandal there also; for as there was a Ham in the ark, and as there was a Judas among the apostles, so in this sacred place also, in the very sanctuary itself, there were two vile priests whose lives were so infamous, that they went far to disgust people with God's worship altogether, and whose father, alas!—a pious old man in the main—did not discountenance them as he should have done. "The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there."

Now, even where there are not in God's Church scandals as awful as that of Eli's sons,—when we do not meet in the ordinances of God's house men of shameless profligacy or wicked boys, such men and boys as have curses and blasphemies on their lips outside the Church, matching ill with the songs of praise which they sing within,—still there is at all times quite enough of deadness to spiritual things, quite enough of indifference and worldliness in the people who are professionally engaged in God's worship, to drag us down, to be a snare to us, to make us feel that God's house of prayer on earth is a very different thing indeed from His heavenly temple. And this is especially the case, where there are daily services which all must attend. Here—because things which happen to us often make little impression—the worshippers, old and young, are sadly apt to get formal, slovenly, listless, irreverent, and indeed sometimes to go through the whole service without meaning a single word they say. And oh! how great a drag

to well-disposed people who sit near him is a single irreverent singer or chorister, who is not even trying to throw any heart into his work. Do you wish to counteract the deadening effect which a merely formal worship of God is sure to have upon the heart? Ask yourself continually, and force your conscience to answer the questions, "Am I indeed going up to God's heavenly temple? Have I reason to think year by year that I am getting any nearer to it? Do I think more of God and Christ, and take more pleasure in worshipping them? Am I more strict with myself than I used to be? Am I gaining some ground against my faults and sins?" We read in Scripture not only of "going up" to the place of worship, but also of going down from it. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho."^f And be quite sure of this, that there is no possibility of standing still on the pilgrimage to God's heavenly temple. Each day that passes over our heads makes us either better or worse Christians. If I am not at the end of the day more heavenly-minded, there is only one alternative,—I am more earthly-minded. He who finds that he is not going up may assure himself that he is going down.

[NOTES.—v. 1. *Elkanah . . . an Ephrathite*.—By an Ephrathite is probably meant an Ephraimite. Elkanah is called an Ephraimite, because he lived in the country belonging to the tribe of Ephraim. He himself belonged to the tribe of Levi, being descended from Kohath the son of Levi, and from the rebellious Korah, who was Kohath's grandson.—See 1 Chron. vi. 33-39, where Samuel (in v. 33) is called *Shemuel*.

v. 3. *To sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh*.—The tabernacle, which was God's house of prayer until the temple was built, was set up at Shiloh by Joshua, when he had completed his conquest of the promised land.—(See

Joshua xviii. 1.) The name Shiloh is derived from a word which means "to rest;" and it is therefore very appropriate as the name of a place where, after it had been so long carried about in the wilderness, the ark of God at length rested. Jacob also prophesied of our Lord under the name of Shiloh. (Gen. xlix. 10.) And the name is very appropriate to Him who is the Rest-giver and the Peace-maker, according to those words of His own, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST."—S. Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30. And see Romans v. 1, and Ephesians ii. 14-18.]

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT SETTING OUR HEARTS UPON THINGS.

I SAM I. 4-13.

4. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions :

5. But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion ; for he loved Hannah : but the Lord had shut up her womb.

6. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.

7. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her ; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

8. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou ? and why eatest thou not ? and why is thy heart grieved ? am not I better to thee than ten sons ?

9. So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord.

10. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.

11. And she bowed a bow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

PERHAPS there is none of God's commandments which we break so early in life as the tenth, which says "Thou shalt not covet." This

commandment forbids us to set our heart fondly and passionately upon things. The young are very apt to do so, and at a very early age. A baby will cry passionately for the moon, because the moon is so beautiful, and the eye of an infant is not practised enough to tell how far off it is; or it will clutch with tiny grasp at some shining object within its reach, and burst into a storm of tears and cries if it is refused. Children who are much older show very strong and passionate longings for all sorts of objects, the reason why children do this especially being that they have had none of the experience of older people, which would show them, if they had it, how very disappointing these objects are when men do reach them, and how very very soon their gloss wears off. The Bible teaches us by several striking examples how foolish, as well as how wrong, it is to indulge passionate longings for things which God does not see fit to give. One of these is the example of the Israelites, who, though God fed them with manna in the wilderness, lusted after some stronger, hotter, more stimulating, more exciting food.^a And God sent them quails in such abundance as to create in them a horrible nausea and loathing of that animal food which they had lusted after,^b and smote them withal with a pestilence, which mowed down into the arms of death the murmurers that lusted.^c "He gave them their desire, and sent leanness withal into their soul."^d Another case is that of good King Hezekiah, who, when God was about to cut him off by a mortal disease, prayed before the Lord and wept sore, imploring with passionate grief that his span might

^a Num. xi. 4, 5, 6. ^b Num. xi. 19, 20. ^c Num. xi. 33, 34.

^d Ps. cvi. 15, *P. B. V.*

be lengthened.^e God gave him, in answer to his prayer, fifteen more years of life. But Hezekiah had much better have allowed God's first plan for him to stand. The fifteen additional years did neither him nor his people any good. If he had died then and there, he would have died in the zenith of his spiritual prosperity, and without any cloud on his fame; but the fifteen additional years led him, it seems, to pride himself on being a special favourite of Heaven. And when the King of Babylon's ambassadors came to visit him, their visit drew forth all the vaingloriousness of his heart; and Hezekiah made a display to them of his glory and greatness without any reference to the God from whom his glory and greatness came, and drew forth from God an angry threatening that his successors should be despoiled of all on which he so much prided himself.^f Add to this that, by a comparison of the dates, we find that, had Hezekiah's life not been prolonged, Manasseh, whose wickedness called down from heaven the vengeance of God upon the nation which he governed, would never have been born.^g

And Hannah,—what shall we say of her passionate longing and prayer for a child? Was this sinful, like the longing of the Israelites for gross and stimulating food? or was it foolish, and wanting in judgment, like good King Hezekiah's prayer for a longer life? There are traces in the story of its having been neither the one nor the other. In the first place, the granting of her request turned out thoroughly well; it turned out not only for her own happiness and honour, but for the good

^e 2 Kings xx. 1-4; Isa. xxxviii. 1-4. ^f 2 Kings xx. 12-19; Isa. xxxix. 1-8. ^g Comp. 2 Kings xxi. 1, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1 with 2 Kings xx. 6, Isa. xxxviii. 5.

of the Church and people of God, which does not look as if God was displeased with it. Then look at the mind of the woman herself—what a holy and good woman she seems to have been. She was a prophetess, her song in the second Chapter containing a prophecy of David and of Christ. This of itself, however, would not show her to have been a holy woman or a child of God, for Balaam too prophesied of David and of Christ;^h but the sentiments expressed in *her* prophecy could not possibly have proceeded from any one who did not belong to God's true people. Witness the first words of it—words which were afterwards repeated by St. Mary the Virgin in *her* song,ⁱ which shows how like-minded these two holy women were:—"My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation."^j Then observe, too, how little of herself there is in her petition, as it is expressed in her vow. She vows that she will give the child unto the Lord "all the days of his life." Her child, as being a Levite,^k would, in the ordinary course of things, be bound to the service of the tabernacle from the age of twenty to the age of fifty; but Hannah vows that she will give him up to the service of the Lord from his earliest childhood. And so she did. For immediately after he was weaned, when he was just learning to prattle innocently; and to be an interest to her, she brought him up to appear before the Lord, and there left him to abide for ever in the charge of Eli. After that, the child never gladdened his mother's eye, nor could she ever press him to her

^h Num. xxiv. 17.ⁱ S. Luke i. 46, 47.^j 1 Sam. ii. 1.^k See Num. iv. 3 and 1 Chron. xxiii. 24-28.

heart, except when she came up once a year with his father to offer the yearly sacrifice, bringing with her that token of a mother's love, the little coat¹ (a priest's robe, it would seem, something corresponding to the surplice among ourselves), which in the course of the year she had made for him. It was clear that she had great, disinterested, patriotic views for the child, altogether distinct from any consideration of her own comfort in him; and probably in making her vow she must have been guided by some intimation from the Holy Spirit that a great honour was in store for her, but that she must seek it in the appointed way in which all blessings are to be had—in prayer and sacrifice of the mere natural inclinations. As to her fretting under the galling and cruel gibes of Peninnah, which it appears embittered her existence,^m it is quite possible that, being like the rest of us, sinful, she, like Moses, may have allowed herself in some measure of exasperation; but it is clear, from the soothing and affectionate words which he addressed to her,ⁿ that her husband considered that she was subjected to a most severe trial. Shall man feel so tenderly for us, and speak so kindly to us, when we are irritated, vexed, thwarted, fretted? and shall we suppose that, under such circumstances, the loving heart of the Saviour will not open to His people, and His sympathy flow forth to them to heal their smart? If her husband felt for Hannah's vexation, be quite sure her Heavenly Father longed much more to console her. And He can console when He will; whereas all that men can do is to wish us consoled.

From what has been said, we should learn a

¹ 1 Sam. ii. 18, 19. ^m 1 Sam. i. 6, 7. ⁿ 1 Sam. i. 8.

great lesson about our prayers, and still more about our desires, which, be it remembered, are prayers in the sight of God, even if we do not fall on our knees and express them before Him. We may desire as strongly, as passionately as we please, and we cannot pray too importunately for anything, *of which it is certain that it would be good for us to have it*—more faith, more hope, more love, more strength to resist temptation, more light to show us the evil of sin and the preciousness of Christ. If our heart's longing be for spiritual blessings to ourselves or others, it cannot be too fervent, though even here we must be content to leave entirely to our heavenly Father the time at which, and the manner in which, He will grant what we ask. But no desire for an earthly gratification may be brought before God, no prayer for another position in life, or for success in anything we are trying for, or for deliverance from some trouble which comes to us as part of our daily lot, may be offered, without adding to the petition for it these or the like words; "Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." We should go to God about it with the assurance that He who so loved us as to give His Son for us, will not, cannot, deny us anything which would really be for our advantage. With this condition, we are at liberty to ask exactly what we like. We cannot ask too much, too often, too earnestly. We must not expect, indeed, always to receive what we ask for. God will not give us a stone when we cry for bread, nor a serpent when we ask a fish, nor a scorpion when we beseech Him for an egg.^o He sees that what we really want is that which will nourish our immortal spirit, and satisfy

^o See S. Luke xi. 11, 12, 13.

that large desire for good, for the highest good, which there is in the hearts of all of us. Certainly He will not give us, in reply, what might hinder us (like a stone) in running the race which is set before us, or sting us and poison us in a spiritual sense (like a serpent or a scorpion). But we may always expect sooner or later to carry away some solid good from our prayer, better than what we had coveted. What can be better for us than a sweet sense of peace, in the assurance that His wisdom is watching over, His love providing, His care shielding us? *This He has promised*: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."^p

And His promise cannot fail.

[NOTES.—*v. 4. when the time was that Elkanah offered.*—His offering was what was called a peace-offering. In this kind of offering, after the animal had been killed, the priest received its breast and right shoulder as his lawful portion, while the rest was given back to the worshipper, that he and his family might feast upon it "before the Lord."

v. 5. But unto Hannah he gave a worthy (marg. *a double portion*).—This was to show his affection and regard for her, just as Joseph sent to Benjamin a mess five times as large as that which he sent to his other brothers (Gen. xliii. 34), and as Samuel kept the shoulder of the victim for Saul (1 Sam. ix. 23, 24) by way of doing honour to the new king.

v. 8. am not I better to thee than ten sons?—The Arabians were accustomed to consider a mother who had ten sons as a truly noble and distinguished woman, and perhaps the Israelites may have had some notion of the same sort. And this may be the reason why Elkanah mentions *ten sons*. Perhaps, however, *ten* may only be put for a *great many*, as in Num.

xiv. 22, "Because all those men . . . have tempted me now these ten times."

v. 9. *Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post.*—This seat was probably the throne which he usually occupied as high priest and judge; and when it is said that it was by a post of the tabernacle, what is probably meant is one of the outside gate-posts. It was from this throne (which we must suppose to have been raised a little, like a bishop's throne or a judge's bench) that he afterwards fell down and broke his neck.—(See 1 Sam. iv. 18.)

v. 11. *there shall no razor come upon his head.*—Samuel was to be a Nazarite, in pursuance of his mother's vow, just as Samson (Judges xiii. 3, 4, 5) and S. John the Baptist (S. Luke i. 13, 15) were Nazarites by the direction of an angel given to their parents before they were born. The word *Nazarite* is derived from a Hebrew word meaning to *separate*; because the persons under this vow were obliged to separate themselves from three things—1. wine and strong drink; 2. the use of the razor; 3. pollution by touching a dead body. See an account of the Nazarite's vow in Numbers vi. And see also the beginning of the next chapter of this work.]

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE NAZARITE AND THE BAPTISMAL VOW.

I SAM. I. II.

And she bowed a bow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

WE find from this verse that Samuel was born under a vow, which is called the vow of the Nazarite. The word "Nazarite" means "separated," and denotes that the person taking the vow, or on whom the vow was laid, was separated from the rest of the people—devoted or consecrated to God's service in a special manner. St. Paul speaks, you may remember, of his having been "separated from" his "mother's womb,"^a meaning that God set him apart, as soon as he was born, for the great and holy work of preaching the Gospel to the heathen, on which he was to enter after his conversion. And in due time he was set apart by the Church also, by the outward visible sign of lay-

^a Gal. i. 15.

ing on of hands; for we find that the Holy Ghost said to the prophets and teachers in the Church of Antioch; "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."^b And when these prophets and teachers had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them, thus consecrating them to the special work for which God in His eternal counsels had already set them apart, and sent them away on their first missionary voyage.^c This shows that the separation of the Nazarite, from which he took his name, meant that he was set apart and solemnly consecrated to do a particular work, or lead a particular life. Samuel was thus set apart from his earliest infancy, both in the counsels of God, and by his mother's vow, which was made before he was born. The particular work he was to do was to attend upon the services of the tabernacle, and to assist the priest in conducting those services, while he was young; and, after he grew up, to act as a great prophet, and set up the monarchy of Israel, and direct both king and people by the messages which God put in his mouth. The obligations under which Nazarites were laid—the outward visible signs of their being specially consecrated to God's service—you will find in Numbers vi. One of them is mentioned in the verse before us. The Nazarite was never to cut his hair. The hair was looked upon as a mark of bodily strength; and therefore this obligation probably signified that the Nazarite was to devote all his bodily powers to the service of God. You will remember that Samson's great strength was connected with his hair; that when his hair was shorn off he became weak,^d and fell into the hands

^b Acts xiii. 2.^c See Acts xiii. 3.^d Judges xvi. 17, 19.

of his enemies ; and that when it was allowed to grow again, his strength came back to him in such large measure that he was able to pull down a house full of people, by leaning against the pillars which held it up.^e—Another obligation was, that the Nazarite was never to drink any wine or strong drink. Intoxicating liquors enfeeble and confuse the mind ; and therefore this restriction probably denoted that the Nazarite was to give up all his powers of mind to God's service. You will find this obligation mentioned by the Angel to Zacharias, when he predicted to him the birth and manner of life of St. John the Baptist, thus laying on him the vow of a Nazarite from his mother's womb. "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink ; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost," (which exhilarates and gladdens the soul of man just as wine raises his animal spirits,) "even from his mother's womb."^f—The Nazarite was also forbidden to touch or approach a dead body, or anything which had come in contact with a corpse, though, as it appears that one who was a *Nazarite for life* did not take this part of the vow (for Samson certainly was defiled by dead bodies on several occasions) ; and as we are now speaking only of those who were laid under the vow for life, and did not take it of their own accord for a term of days, we may put aside the consideration of this point.

Nothing more needs to be said about the Nazarite vow, except that three very remarkable Scripture personages were laid under it for life—Samson, who was a layman, being of the tribe of Dan ; Samuel, who was a Levite ; and St. John.

^e Judges xvi. 22, 30.

^f S. Luke i. 15.

the Baptist, who, being the son of the priest Zacharias, was himself also by birth a priest.

It might seem as if this Nazarite vow were of very little interest to us, who have been born and bred under the Christian dispensation, and who are no longer under the rules of the Jewish law. But there is no part of God's holy Word, which only gives us curious information, and is not of practical use to us. And a little thought on this subject will soon show that the circumstances of Christian children are very similar to those of Samuel. Just as Samuel was dedicated to God by the act of his mother, before he was born, so from our very earliest infancy our parents brought us to holy Baptism, and solemnly dedicated us to God at the font. Just as it was a great advantage to Samuel to be brought up in the tabernacle, amidst the services of the house of God, and to receive instruction in the law from Eli the priest, so the vow under which our parents laid us in infancy has been to us also the greatest of blessings, inasmuch as it put us under the guidance of God's grace from our earliest childhood, and was followed up by instilling into us the knowledge of those truths, a belief of which alone can make us good and happy. To be educated under the shelter of the Church of Christ must be at least as great a blessing to us, as it was to Samuel to be educated in the courts of the tabernacle. But let us look at the vow itself, under which we were laid in our infancy; and we shall see that in some points it strongly resembles the vow of the Nazarites. In the first place, the Nazarite was laid by his vow under certain restraints, to which other people were not subjected.

He was not free to do what all the world did. He might not shave his head, nor drink any sort of wine. And it is likely enough that, with his long hair and habits of abstinence, he may have often been sneered at as strange and peculiar and different from the rest of mankind. Just so, our baptismal vow binds us to "renounce" (give up and have nothing to do with) "the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." It binds us (in other words) entirely to give up lying, pride, ambition, and the enticing others into sin. It obliges us to give up all amusements which are sinful, or cruel, or which we find to be hurtful to our own souls, and never to follow a multitude in doing something of which our conscience disapproves. It restrains us also from indulging feelings of passionateness, greediness, and lust, and pledges us to say to all such feelings, when they arise within us, "Get thee behind me, Satan,"⁸ and so to cast them out of our hearts.

But we must not regard our baptismal vow as merely restraining us from certain wrong things. It consecrated us, just as the Nazarite was consecrated, both in *body* and *mind*, to God, and pledged us to serve Him with all the powers of both. First, it pledged us to serve Him with all the powers of *the body*; to turn away *the ear* from flattery and sinful enticement, and to employ it in listening to good advice and hearing God's Word; to mortify the lust of *the eye*, and to employ it in reading God's book, or gazing with devout feelings on God's works; to keep *the hand* from picking and stealing, and to employ it in honest labour, and in giving alms to those that

⁸ S. Luke iv. 8.

need; to refrain *the foot* from every evil way, and to employ it in visiting people in distress, or in going to church,—which in other words is running upon God's errands; finally, to keep the "*tongue* from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering," from gossip, and tattle, and immodest defiling talk, and to employ it in God's praises, and (as opportunity offers) in useful conversation. And, next, this holy vow pledged us to serve God with all the powers of the *mind*, and to give up all habits which weaken the mind, and make it unfit for active service. It pledged us, therefore, to be temperate in the use of food, never eating so much as to unfit ourselves for work; temperate in the use of amusements, making them the means of brightening the mind, not of dissipating it; to be diligent in improving our natural talents, in learning all that we possibly can while young, and in stocking our mind with useful knowledge.

Now take these separate articles of your vow, the vow which was laid upon you in Baptism, and which will be, or has been, taken upon you by your own free choice in Confirmation, and ask yourself how far you are fulfilling them. You can make even now, I think, a rough guess at the answer. Are you regarding yourself as a person consecrated to God from the earliest hour of your existence, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices," acceptable to Him "by Jesus Christ"^h—the sacrifice of spirit, soul, and body,ⁱ the sacrifice of almsgiving,^j the sacrifice of praise?^k To do this on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ, and because we have first received into our hearts God's pardoning restoring mercy through Him—this, and nothing short of this, is to be a Christian.

^h 1 Pet. ii. 5. ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 23. ^j Heb. xiii, 16. ^k Heb. xiii, 15.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUCCESS OF HANNAH'S PRAYER, AND THE REASONS FOR IT.

I SAM. I. 12-19.

12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

13. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

15. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord; I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

16. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

HANNAH'S prayer had two effects—an effect upon the order of events, and an effect upon her own mind. First, an effect on the order of events. She carried away what she sued for.

God gave her Samuel in answer to her prayer. Secondly, it had a soothing effect upon her own mind. She dried her eyes after it, and was bright and cheerful again; for we read that "the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." So in her case both an Old Testament and a New Testament promise to prayer were fulfilled. In the Psalms we read: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."^a God did deliver Hannah, when she called upon Him, from the provocations and humiliations to which she was subjected in her husband's house. And St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Philippians, bids us "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."^b Hannah did make known her requests to God by prayer and supplication, and having cast her care upon Him, had struggled to be cheerful. And we see her, after doing this, in enjoyment of the promised peace. She "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

Now, it will be profitable to ask, What was it that gave Hannah's prayer such effect,—that made it so successful? And the same remarks which are made upon it will apply also to the vow made by Jacob,^c when he had left his father's house, with only his staff in his hand, and was flying to Padan-Aram to escape the wrath of his brother. This vow, though having a totally different object, has some very similar features with Hannah's.

^a Ps. i. 15.^b Phil. iv. 6, 7.^c Gen. xxviii. 20, 21, 22.

(1.) Both Jacob's prayer and Hannah's prayer are very short. Hannah's consists of a single verse. It is quite clear that the much speaking has nothing to do with being heard. "Use not vain repetitions,"^d says our Saviour. You are speaking to a Father who "knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."^e All the successful prayers of the saints, all the prayers that have won their way to the ear of God, and called down the blessing instantaneously as a lightning-conductor draws down the electric fluid to the earth, have been brief. The Lord's Prayer, which is the perfect form given by Christ for our use, may be recited in sixty seconds. Our Lord's great prayer of intercession, in the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel, is an exception to the rule. It occupies one whole chapter of the Bible. But then this is a peculiar case. It is a kind of sample of the prayer which our great High Priest is ever offering on our behalf in heaven above; and since this intercession of His is continual (for "he ever liveth to make intercession for"^f us), it is meet and right that there should be in this sample of it some token of perpetuity. And this token we find in the length of the prayer.

(2.) Both Hannah's prayer and Jacob's were offered when the offerer was in trouble. Jacob was flying from the face of Esau; he had just been torn away from his father and mother, and was reasonably apprehensive of his brother's wrath. She had been galled and humiliated by the unkind gibes of Peninnah; her troubles were like Jacob's in this respect, that they were domestic troubles, and embittered her life at home. Now

^d S. Matt. vi. 7.^e S. Matt. vi. 8.^f Heb. vii. 25.

observe the wonderful graciousness and tenderness of God, that He makes a *special* promise to prayer offered up in distress, whether of mind, body, or estate. "Call upon me," says He, "in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."^g It is the same God who, in the New Testament, gives to persons in trouble an invitation of the same sort, but in terms even more consolatory and gracious; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."^h And in the 107th Psalm you have this surpassing graciousness of God in listening to the cries of the afflicted brought forward again and again as a matter of experience. It is the experience of weary wanderers, of prisoners, of people sick unto death, of tempest-tossed sailors;—"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses."ⁱ God seems to take less notice of us when our affairs are prosperous, our hearts light, our spirits good; but when we cry unto Him out of the pressure of distress, then we have a special warrant to expect His help. Hannah mixed tears with her prayers, for she "prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore." Christ mixed tears with His prayers in the garden, "who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death."^j And God puts such tears as are consecrated by prayers into His bottle^k—stores them up as something precious in His sight, something to which He must needs make an answer.

"He soothes my griefs, allays my fears,
And counts and treasures up my tears."

^g Ps. l. 15.

^h S. Matt. xi. 28.

ⁱ Ps. cvii. 6, 13, 19, 28.

^j Heb. v. 7.

^k Ps. lvi. 8.

(3.) Again, Hannah's prayer was secret. It was not spoken in articulate language. "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." Eli had no idea she was praying; even accused her of being under the influence of wine. "Thou, when thou prayest," says our Lord, "enter into thy closet," (you may not have a closet in your house, but you certainly have one in your heart,) "and, when thou hast shut thy door" upon worldly thoughts and things, "pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."¹ He rewarded Hannah in the sight of all Israel, by giving her a great prophet to be her son.

(4.) Hannah fully looked for and expected a result from her prayer. I gather this from the fact of her making a vow. No person offering prayer as a mere matter of duty and religious observance, and not expecting to be the gainer from it, would ever bind himself by a solemn promise to act in a certain way if his prayer were granted. He who makes a vow shows, not only that his heart is much set on the blessing which he sues for, but that he has a good hope of reaching it; why else should he make the vow? Hannah, therefore, no doubt expected that she should receive what she asked for, and thus fulfilled one great condition of successful prayer which is laid down by our Lord; "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."^m It was her belief that her prayer was heard, and would be answered, which restored to her her cheerfulness and peace of mind.

¹ S. Matt. vi. 6.

^m S. Mark xi. 24.

It is a good and blessed thing to offer prayer as an act of duty and as a religious observance. Never leave this undone in the morning when you rise, nor in the evening when you retire to rest. And it is a good thing also,—and for the busy, the young and inexperienced, a necessary thing—to use forms of prayer, and to make them our own by repeating them attentively and devoutly. But you will never enter fully into the spirit of prayer, unless you practise yourself occasionally in praying in your own words. It is impossible to pour out the soul before the Lord in a set form prepared beforehand. That can only be done in this way. When you are vexed, anxious, thwarted, troubled about anything, try to tell the story in the simplest words to God, asking deliverance from the trouble, if it be His good pleasure to grant it; if not, asking patience under it, and to be kept from going wrong, and acting in any way contrary to His will. Seek to be perfectly open, and to tell everything that is upon your mind,—your temptations, the difficulties you find in keeping your temper and conduct right, and what your special wishes are under the circumstances. This is by no means so easy a thing as it seems. Something will whisper that the trouble is too commonplace and trifling to be made a subject of prayer, that it is almost irreverent to express yourself to God in homely words, and that you ought to use only Prayer-book or Bible phrases in conversing with Him. The whisper must not be listened to. It is with the heart we speak to God, not with the mouth. And what the heart really desires in trouble is, either deliverance from it, or support under it. Nor is anything which is really a vexation of

heart to us too trifling to be brought under His notice. Our Heavenly Father, our Divine Friend, is pleased and honoured by the confidence we repose in Him. He would have our prayer to be not only an act of homage, but an act of confidence; not only an abasement of the heart before His majesty, but a pouring forth of the heart before His fatherly goodness. We shall never make it so in any measure without reaping a rich reward—not always indeed the deliverance which we sued for, and which might not be for our highest good; but always some good measure of the “peace which passeth understanding,” so that our countenance shall be no more sad.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE SINFULNESS OF RASH JUDGMENTS.

I SAM. I. 13-18.

13. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart ; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard : therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken ? put away thy wine from thee.

15. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord ; I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

16. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial : for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace : and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

ELI altogether mistook Hannah. She was engaged in an act of devotion. He thought that she was under the influence of wine. We read of something not very unlike this in the New Testament. When the Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles at the feast of Pentecost, they "began to speak with other tongues, as the

Spirit gave them utterance.”^a They spake “in” these “tongues the wonderful works of God”^b—that is, it was not common conversation which fell from their lips, but the praises of God for His wonderful works of mercy and grace in sending His Son to save mankind, and His Spirit to sanctify them. And no doubt they spake these praises with a certain fervour and loftiness of manner, being at the time in a sort of rapture. This was a very strange and puzzling sight for persons who had no heart for the praises of God, and who did not sympathize with the spiritual joy which wakened up these praises from the lips of the Apostles. And so some of them said that this sort of ecstasy, or rapture, was due to the influence of wine; “others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.”^c Both Hannah and the Apostles were charged with intemperance—she for praying to God, they for praising Him.

This was not the first time, nor will it be the last, that God’s true servants have been mocked and falsely accused for actions which have been really pious and devout. They are “a peculiar people”^d—peculiar, that is, to the world, who cannot understand their ways. If you resolve to be a Christian, indeed, you must be prepared to be misunderstood, and to have things said about you which are not true. You are very likely to be thought hot-headed and enthusiastic; people will shake their head as they talk of you, and say that no doubt you mean well, but you go too far; you are right in the heart, but light in the head. Particularly will this be the case with your acts of devotion. You will perhaps be thought singular, and

^a Acts ii. 4. ^b Acts ii. 11. ^c Acts ii. 13. ^d 1 Pet. ii. 9.

sneered at for giving so much time to your prayers or the reading of the Bible; or your attendance at the Holy Communion will be remarked upon, and attributed to a wrong motive. It will be said that you desire to curry favour with those who have charge of you, or are set over you, and therefore draw near to the Holy Table, when really there was not a thought in your heart but how you might obey and please your Heavenly Master. You can remember, then, for your comfort and support, how God's true servants, and Hannah among them, have always been misunderstood, and sometimes cruelly misconstrued.

Eli's judgment of Hannah was a rash one. He should not have censured her for intemperance, without much better grounds to go upon. And the fault was all the worse in him, because he was high priest; and, as God's minister, he ought, even supposing her to have gone astray, to have shown some pity and gentleness in reproving her, according to that word of the Apostle to the Hebrews, in which he describes the character and qualifications of an high priest taken from among men:—"Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."^e We read in Chapter iii. that a most severe sentence was passed by God upon Eli's house:—"I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."^f This severe judgment of his upon the pious Hannah was probably one of the sins which drew down God's anger upon the old priest. If

^e Heb. v. 2.

^f 1 Sam. iii. 13.

Eli (according to the counsel given by the Apostle Paul^g) had judged himself and his own house, seriously taking himself to task for his weak partiality to his sons, and giving them such a rebuff for their vileness as should have restrained them, he would not have been judged by God. But as it was, he judged and reprimanded Hannah, instead of judging himself and reprimanding his sons.

The sin of rash judgment and censoriousness is a very serious one, however lightly we may be disposed to think of it. This is evident both from reason and from the Bible. As we have plenty of faults to find at home—as our consciences, when fairly and honestly examined, are continually condemning us for what we allow ourselves to think, and say, and do—it must be the height of presumption to go out of ourselves, and to pass judgment upon our neighbour.—Then, again, we have not the material for judging our neighbour fairly. His conduct, indeed, is under our eyes; but how can we know what have been his motives and intentions? And conduct, in any fair estimate of it, takes its complexion from the motives which have prompted it. In a particular case, a person's conduct may have been very bad outwardly; but if we knew (what we cannot know) the strength of his temptations, and the excuses which are to be made for him from the ignorance in which he has been brought up, or the bad examples which he has had before his eyes, and so forth, it might not, after all, look so very bad as it does.—Lastly, judgment, like vengeance, belongs to God,^h and to God only. “He that judgeth me,” says the Apostle, “is the Lord.”ⁱ

^g See 1 Cor. xi. 31. ^h Deut. xxxii. 35; Rom. xii. 19. ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

So that a man who presumes to pass judgment on another is trespassing upon the province and office of the Lord Jesus Christ. "He hath prepared his throne for judgment,"^j we are told; and it is much as if the censorious person, seeing this judgment-throne set up, and awaiting the Lord's arrival, presumed to run up the steps of it, and set himself down as judge therein.

But we are expressly forbidden by our Lord Himself, in his sermon on the Mount, to judge others. "Judge not," He says, "that ye be not judged."^k Are we never, then, it may be asked, to judge others? How can we help forming a judgment upon the character and conduct of those around us? The answer is that we never may judge others, in the true and proper sense of the word "judge." We cannot, indeed, help seeing and knowing the faults of those who come across us. But to see and know a person's faults is one thing; to judge him is another. To judge him implies that we try him in our own thoughts, hear the evidence for and against him, sum up what is to be said on both sides, and find him guilty. This we may never do under any circumstances. Perhaps it may be said that, in order to the due execution of the laws, magistrates and judges *must* sit in judgment on their fellow-men. But the administration of justice is, after all, God's doing rather than man's. The magistrate or judge acts in it as God's representative, and by His commission, as the Apostle says, "He is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."^l And, besides, judges and magistrates never do sit in judgment upon anything but a man's outward conduct. Even

^j Ps. ix. 7.

^k S. Matt. vii. 1.

^l Rom. xiii. 4.

they never presume to sum up his character, to decide upon the motives and intentions of his heart, and to say definitively, "This is a good or a bad man." We cannot, indeed, help *suspecting* that the doer of a bad action is a bad man; yet even the suspicion must not be allowed to go further than the facts warrant.

Having committed himself to a false accusation, Eli did the best thing he could to repair it. As soon as the strange manner of Hannah was explained to him, he dismissed her in peace and with his blessing. "Go in peace," said he, "and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." The best thing we can do, if we have brought a false charge against any one, is, with as little loss of time as possible, to admit our error, and to retract the charge as publicly as it was made. And what we may fairly hope to carry away from devout attendance at God's house, and the pouring out our soul before Him there in prayer, is His peace, covenanted to us in those beautiful words, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."^m

Eli dismissed Hannah with this peace, and prayed for her. And even Christian ministers have no better blessing to bestow upon their flocks, as they depart from the house of prayer.

[NOTES.—*v. 13. her voice was not heard.*—It was usual to pray out loud in the East, and among the Jews. They seem

^m Phil. iv. 6, 7.

to have had little or no idea of praying in the mind only. without any utterance of the mouth. Hence Eli, seeing that Hannah did not speak, but only moved her mouth, did not understand that she was praying.

v. 15. *I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink.*—She does not mean to say that she had drunk *no* wine; for we are told in v. 9 that all of them “had drunk,” but only that the movement of her lips was not due to her drinking, but was to be explained by quite another cause.

v. 16. *Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial.*—The word *belial* means *wickedness*; and a son or daughter of Belial means *a wicked man or woman*. St. Paul, however, in 2 Cor. vi. 15, uses the word *Belial* as if it were a proper name, the name of the devil, or of some idol; “What concord hath Christ with Belial?” The first place in the Bible in which the expression is found is Deut. xiii. 13, where those are called “children of Belial,” who tempt their fellow-citizens to worship other gods, and therefore are the devil’s agents. In the books of Samuel the name occurs more frequently than elsewhere.]

CHAPTER VII.

BE SURE YOUR PRAYER WILL FIND YOU OUT.

I SAM. I. 19-23.

19. And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her.

20. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

21. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his bow.

22. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever.

23. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

THAT is a weighty word, which Moses spoke to the Reubenites and the Gadites; "Be sure your sin will find you out."^a It is as if we parted company with a sin, when we had committed it, and the sin went one way and we another. Just

^a Num. xxxii. 23.

as an idle, good-for-nothing young man in a village sometimes takes it into his head to enlist in a regiment going abroad, and the clergyman and squire are thankful to have got rid of him; but they have not got rid of him of good, for back he comes after many years, having been drummed out of his regiment, and thrown upon the wide world, and having fallen into bad company, and become a hardened profligate man,—back he comes, I say, to find employment where he is known, and sets a bad example, and becomes a great curse to the village,—just so the sins that we do in our youth come back to us again after many days, in the shape of confirmed bad habits, agonizing remorse, fearful looking for of judgment; and ugly and unwelcome visitors they are.

It might be said of prayer, as it is said of sin, “Be sure your prayer will find you out.” The prayer and you part company for a time. You lose sight of it, and perhaps forget it; but you shall see it again. It shall visit you after many days. Noah put forth out of the ark a little feeble fluttering dove, which, after flying about and finding no rest, came back to him on two distinct occasions—the last time with an olive-leaf in her mouth plucked off, which was a sign to Noah that the waters were abated, and also a symbol of peace.^b This is a beautiful emblem of our prayers. We send them forth from the window of our heart feeble and fluttering, but they return into our own bosom sooner or later with an answer. The answer is *sometimes* the very thing we asked for, only in a better shape than we dared hope to receive it in. *Always* it is the peace of God shed abroad in our hearts, from a sweet assurance of

^b Gen. viii. 8-12.

our Father's love, and a firm persuasion that all will be well if we do but cast our burden upon Him. Now this was Hannah's case. Her prayer came back to her in both these ways. Eli dismissed her in peace and with his blessing. "Go in peace," he said, "and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him."^c *Go in peace*; this was the dove coming back with the olive branch. Hannah was soothed by the assurance that He to whom she had prayed cared for her, listened to her, would at least take into gracious consideration her request, and grant so much of it as might be for her good. Next morning early they had to strike their tent, gather up their few moveables, pay their farewell devotions at the tabernacle, pack and mount their asses, travel home again, and betake themselves to home duties. And these things brushed away from Hannah's mind for a time the prayer which she had offered, and the vow which she had made. But they were to return to her, when the time was come about, "in revolution of days." *The God of Israel granted her her petition that she had asked of Him.* The child which she had prayed for was sent her. She had looked forward to this child's becoming nothing more than a Nazarite—one specially dedicated to God, and employed all the days of his life in the service of the tabernacle and in its holy ministries. But God gave her for a son a great prophet, the first of a long succession of prophets, and one who was destined to found the monarchy of Israel: He is "wont to give more than either we desire" (that is, request, ask Him for) "or deserve."^d

And now that she has obtained from God the

^c 1 Sam. i. 17.

^d Collect for twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

child she had asked for, let us observe how careful she is to fulfil her vow. A vow is a contract with God—that is, an engagement to do something for Him, on condition of His doing something for us. Hannah had engaged that her child should be given unto the Lord all the days of his life. And now that she has obtained the child, she is very anxious to perform her part of the contract. She could not, indeed, perform it immediately. Until he was weaned (that is, according to the Jewish custom, for three years after his birth) her child would be dependent upon her; and her home was at a very long distance from Shiloh, where the tabernacle was. She might, indeed, have gone up year by year with her husband to Shiloh to offer the yearly sacrifice, taking the child with her; but not to speak of the inconvenience of such an arrangement, and the risk which the infant would run, she would have had to carry him back with her until he was quite weaned; and how, then, could her promise be literally performed, “I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life?”^e She would seem to be almost mocking God, by withdrawing her child from the tabernacle as soon as she had presented him there. No; when she presents him, she will present him for good, and never reclaim him. He shall “there abide for ever.” Her husband quite goes along with her in her plans. “Do what seemeth thee good,” says he; “tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word.”

What Elkanah meant by “the word of the Lord” requires a little consideration. We do not find that God had made any promise in express

^e 1 Sam. i. 11.

words respecting Samuel. But though God had not spoken, He had acted. He had given Hannah the child, and thus had fulfilled His part of the contract, and signified it to be His will that she should fulfil hers. Probably, too, it had been whispered to both of them by God's Spirit, as it must have been whispered to the parents of Moses when he was born, that this child was, in the counsels of God, destined to do great things in His service. And this whisper to them of the child's future greatness was taken, and rightly taken, to be the "word of the Lord." Only, if this word of the Lord was to come to pass—if Hannah was to have an opportunity of completing the contract into which she had entered with God, and of which God had fulfilled His part—the child must be shielded from the numerous dangers of infancy, and reared and brought to maturity. Elkanah's prayer, then, is that God would thus shield, rear, and bring him to maturity. "Stay behind, and nurse him, as you propose, till he is of an age to be presented in the tabernacle; and meanwhile God shield, and protect, and bless him and you, so that in due time your vow may take full effect, and the hopes which God has put into our heart respecting this child may be realized."

Again we are led to think of our Baptismal vow, and of the slackness, so very different from Hannah's earnestness, both of parents and children, in fulfilling it. Every child, and not Samuel only, is the gift of God to its parents. "Lo, children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord."^f Moreover, when a child is brought to Baptism in faith and prayer, a second birth is conferred upon it; by the laver

^f Ps. cxxvii. 4, *P. B. V.*

of regeneration in Baptism, it is by God's mercy born again, and solemnly consecrated to the service of Christ. Now, then, comes our part of the contract. God has given to the child both its natural and its spiritual being. But He has done so on the express understanding that He is hereafter to have the child's services; that what He has first given is to be given back to Himself. For two or three years, until the intelligence dawns, and the moral sense begins to form, nothing can be done. The child is too young to join with Christians in the services of prayer and praise; too young to be brought to church, or even to have the idea of prayer put into its mind. But during those years are the parents praying for it earnestly that, when intelligence dawns, it "may lead the rest of its life according to that beginning"^s at the font? And when it is old enough to be taught something, do they try to imbue its tender mind with an earnest desire to be God's; to live for God; to serve God with lifelong service? And when God's grace and strength have been again imparted in Confirmation, do our young people set about the fulfilment of the Baptismal vow in earnest; bear it continually before their minds as a rule of holy living; deliberately renew it at every reception of the Lord's Supper? It is because parents, sponsors, children, are so little careful and earnest as to the fulfilment of their part of the Covenant, that Baptism seems to be so often without effect, and that its early grace and promise is frustrated, not indeed by any failure on the part of God to bless His own Ordinance, but by man's faithlessness to his engagements.

^s Order of Publick Baptism.

[NOTES.—v. 19. *The Lord remembered her.*—The very same thing is said of Rachel, who had been long without children, and to whom at length God gave Joseph.—(See Gen. xxx. 22.)

v. 20. *She called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.*—The name *Samuel* means “heard of God,” Hannah having asked for a son, and God having heard her. The name *Ishmael* means “God shall hear;” and it was given (by an angel) to the son of Abraham and Hagar, because “the Lord” had “heard” Hagar’s “affliction,” that is, her cry to Him in trouble.—(See Gen. xvi. 11.)

v. 21. *The man Elkanah . . . went up to offer unto the Lord . . . his vow.*—Perhaps he had made a vow to offer some special offering, in case Hannah’s prayer was granted.

v. 22. *I will not go up until the child be weaned.*—The age at which children were weaned among the Jews seems to have been three years. In the Maccabees (2 Macc. vii. 27) we find a Jewish mother thus addressing her son: “O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee, and gave thee suck three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age.” But even at three years old, Samuel must have been very young to have been brought up to the tabernacle, and left there without any woman to take care of him. It has been said that in old times there was a threefold weaning of children: the first from their mother’s milk, at three years old; the second from the care of a nurse, at seven; the third from childish ways, at twelve.—(See *Kitto’s Daily Bible Illustrations*, “Samuel, Saul, and David,” 3d ed. 1854, p. 59.) Perhaps Samuel was not brought to the tabernacle till he was seven, and able to do without a nurse.]

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE CHILD GIVEN BY GOD TO ALL OF US, THAT WE
MAY GIVE HIM BACK AGAIN.

I SAM. I. 24, 25, 26, 27. 28.

24. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

26. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul lieth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord.

27. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.

28. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lieth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.

ELKANAH must have been a consenting party to Hannah's vow, because, by the law about vows in the thirtieth Chapter of the Book of Numbers, no vow that a married woman made could take effect, unless her husband allowed of it.^a So that both parents must have concurred in devoting their child to the immediate service of God in the tabernacle. Nevertheless, as the first thought of this dedication was Hannah's thought, put into her heart (we cannot doubt) by the Holy Spirit,

^a Num. xxx. 6, 7.

Elkanah very properly allows her to take the first part in the transaction, and keeps himself in the background. Yet in the passage just read there are traces of his having been a party to the whole proceeding. In verse 25 we read that "*they* slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli"—not that she alone did so; and in verse 28 we are told that "*he* worshipped the Lord there." The "*he*" is probably Elkanah, who, as head of the family, representative of his wife and child, and as responsible for and concerned in the presentation, offered an act of solemn worship to the Lord.

The picture which is drawn in this passage is that of two parents giving back to the Lord a child which they have first received from Him. It is an interesting thought that the faith and devotion of the Christian may be represented as the presentation to God of a Child given to us by Him. What is the Child that God has given to each one of us to be our own,—as entirely our own as if no other persons but ourselves had an interest in it? Let us learn from the prophet Isaiah; "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given."^b The prophet, as prophets do, is speaking of the future as if it were present, of the thing to be done as if it were already done. In the days when those simple shepherds of Bethlehem kept watch over their flocks by night,^c the thing *was* done. "Unto you," said the angel, echoing the prophet's words, "is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."^d "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son"—gave Him for and to a world lying in wickedness, perishing in its ini-

^b Isaiah ix. 6.^c S. Luke ii. 8.^d S. Luke ii. 11.

quity; for our Lord goes on,—“that whosoever believeth in him *should not perish*, but have everlasting life.”^e We each of us belong to this perishing world, and God gives Christ for and to each of us. He gave Him *for us*—gave Him to be our substitute and representative, in His bitter agonizing death upon the Cross, and in His holy, spotless, and most beautiful life. And now *to each one of us* God gives this Son freely, without money and without price (and that in the face of all our unworthiness, all our guilt, all our ill deserts, however considerable they may have been), to be our atonement, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption. Christian faith means the taking this holy Child to be our own; the throwing open the arms of our heart, as Simeon threw open the arms of his body, to hold the Child and press Him to our bosom; the turning God’s general offer into a particular one; the saying of Christ, “Unto *me* a child is born, unto *me* a son is given;” and the feeling that birth and that gift to be a dawn of new hope and joy in the soul. This taking of Christ to ourselves, to meet our own needs, is the having Him born *within us*, as He has already been born *for us*, according to that word of St. Paul’s, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.”^f If a man listens eagerly to God’s word about Christ, and takes it in, and feeds upon it, and gives himself up to God in consequence, in that man’s heart Christ is born anew. And such an one is, according to the testimony of the Lord himself, more blessed than the Virgin Mary; for when once a woman exclaimed in His presence how happy must be

^e S. John iii. 16.

^f Gal. iv. 19.

the mother of such a Son,^g He replied, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."^h So that the *faith* of a Christian may be truly and scripturally represented as the receiving a Child from God—the having the Child Jesus put into our hearts, and embracing Him with the arms of our affections.

And what else is the *devotion* of a Christian but the presenting again to God of this holy Child in our own behalf, and in behalf of all for whom we are bound to pray. First, *as to our prayers*. Our prayers cannot be heard unless we offer and present to God along with them the Saviour, whom He has first bestowed upon us. He gives Him to our faith, that we may give Him back in our devotion. No single prayer can reach the ear and heart of God which is not offered through Christ, and in the faith of His all-prevailing merits and intercession. And therefore it is that the Church is so careful to end all her prayers, except only those which may be addressed to Christ, with the name of the great Mediator, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is a continual reminder, to those who use the Church prayers, that Christ, in His atonement and righteousness, must be presented to God along with our prayers, if they are to be accepted and answered. But *there is another way, of Christ's own ordaining, in which we must solemnly present Him to God*. We are to plead His atonement and merits, not in words only, but in a significant action prescribed by Himself. We are to take bread and wine, and by consecrating them make them symbols of His flesh which was given, and of His blood which was poured out,

^g S. Luke xi. 27.

^h S. Luke xi. 28.

for the life of the world. With this consecrated bread and wine we make the memorial of His death before God, not indeed repeating His death (it was made once for all, and can never be repeated), but in faith and obedience presenting to God upon earth what Christ is continually presenting for us in heaven, the "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,"¹ which was made when Christ suffered death upon the Cross for our redemption. His person and work are always acceptable to God; and the oftener, the more simply and sincerely, our hearts present Him to God, whether in prayer or Holy Communion, the more largely may we expect that God will shed down upon us His blessings and favours.

Remember, then, this short maxim, that Christian *faith* is receiving the Child Jesus from God, Christian *devotion* the solemnly presenting Him once more to Him from whom we received Him.

[NOTES.—*v. 24. One ephah of flour.*—This flour was what was called a meat-offering, or food-offering; bread, which is made of flour, being the chief food of man. In the time that our English translation of the Scriptures was made, the word *meat* meant food of any description. Now it commonly means *animal* food. The meat-offering was always of fine flour.

v. 25. they slew a bullock.—One of the bullocks was a burnt-offering, and consumed entirely on the altar. The other two were peace-offerings, on which (when the priest had taken his share, the shoulder and breast) the worshippers feasted.

v. 28. as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.—Hannah had five children after Samuel, so that she was no loser by lending to the Lord (see chap. ii. 21). None are losers by lending to God. And there is a way in which all may lend to Him. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."—Prov. xix. 17.]

¹ Prayer of Consecration in the Communion Service.

CHAPTER IX.

OF INFANT BAPTISM AND OF CHILDLIKE CHILDREN.

I SAM. I. 24.

And the child was young.

IN the Hebrew of this passage, the word translated "young" is the same as that translated "child," so that the literal rendering of the words is, "and the child was a child." This may have two meanings, both of which are very instructive.

The first meaning is that the child was young in age, when he was dedicated to the Lord by his parents. In the former part of the verse it is said, "she *took him* up with her," "she *brought him* unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh;" and in the next verse we read, "they *brought the child* to Eli." Very likely the words before us, "the child was young," are put in as a sort of explanation, as much as to say; "He was entirely dependent upon his mother and father; so young that he could not have gone up to Shiloh by himself; if he could walk a little, it was all he could do he could not have brought himself to Eli, or into the house of the Lord." In like manner we read in the Gospels; "They *brought* young children to him, that he should touch them: and his dis-

ciples rebuked those that brought them . . . and he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." ^a The children were so young, of such an age and size, that they could not come to Christ themselves, they were dependent on their mothers or friends who brought them;—so young, too, that our Lord's way of making them welcome was to take them up in His arms, which of course He could not have done unless they had been *quite* young. Now here let us think for a few moments of the great blessings and benefits of Infant Baptism, whereby we were all dedicated to God in our earliest infancy, before we could come to Him for ourselves in repentance and faith. And not only dedicated to God, not only solemnly presented to Him (as Samuel was) in His house of prayer,—something better than that. We received a spiritual blessing in Baptism, received God's grace into our souls, to be to us the principle of a new life, Christ by His minister having taken us up in His arms, put His hands upon us, and blessed us. Now there are some who think that very young children, who cannot repent and believe in Christ, are too young to receive a spiritual blessing, or to have God's Spirit put into their hearts; they cannot imagine a person receiving any spiritual blessing without being conscious of it and feeling it; and of course infants are not conscious of anything when they are brought to the font. The way to answer such persons is as follows:—It is distinctly said that our Lord blessed the children, whom He took up in His arms. Now, did His blessing do these children any good? Of course it did; we cannot suppose that Christ's blessing

^a S. Mark x. 13.

was a kind of compliment, which meant nothing, and was of no avail to those on whom it was bestowed. It were almost blasphemous to suppose that those children, when their parents took them back again out of the Lord's arms, were not better and happier children than when they were placed there; no one ever was blessed by Christ without going away the better for it. Then, *in what sense were they the better for it?* Did they grow up stronger and healthier children in consequence? There is nothing to show that they needed health or strength; they were not sick children, who were brought to Christ for healing; but children, for all that appears, strong and well-grown of their years.—Then are we to suppose that what the Lord's blessing did for them was to make them in after life clever, or rich, or to place them in some high station? Surely no. Cleverness, and riches, and rank may be great snares to people; and the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ does better things for us than these.—Then, once again, how shall we suppose these children to have been better for the Lord's blessing? If Christ's blessing could not be an empty form which did nothing for them, and if we cannot suppose that it gave them either health, or wealth, or talents, or rank, it must have imparted to them some spiritual grace, have planted something in their young hearts which inclined them, when they became responsible for their actions, to dread and shun that which was evil, and to seek and embrace that which was good. This may have been done without our being at all able to understand *how* it was done. An oak springs out of an acorn, and therefore must be in some way or other

wrapped up in it. But how the living germ of the oak is folded up into the acorn not the wisest man on earth can explain.

I suppose there is no mother in Christendom whose heart would not bound for joy to think that her child had been placed in the arms of Jesus, and solemnly blessed by Him. But have not mothers now-a-days, though our Lord is no longer upon earth, the opportunity of securing for their children the very same blessing? The ministers of our Lord in administering holy Baptism act in His name and by His commission. They are, as it were, His mouth and His hands; He does by them as His instruments what we see them doing. And not only does our Lord Himself, though He is no longer seen among men, act by His ministers; but we live under a more blessed and glorious state of things than those parents in the Gospels did, who brought their children to Jesus. The Holy Ghost came down upon the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost, and has ever since filled all its ministrations with grace, and life, and blessing. And as little infants cannot possibly put a bar in the way of His operations by unbelief and impenitence, as older people may and do, we assuredly believe that in Baptism they are not only dedicated to God, but also blessed with the gift of His Spirit. Let us bless God for having given us in our early life this great advantage; so that His grace got (if I may say so) the start of our evil, and stirred us and biassed us towards good, before the natural selfishness of our hearts could manifest itself in action.

But the words, "and the child was young," may bear another and perhaps a more satisfactory meaning. It would be high praise if it were said

of a man, "and the man was a man;" we should understand by it that he was brave, outspoken, fearless, upright, possessed of all manly virtues. And when it is said, "the child was a child," perhaps we are to understand that the little Samuel had all childlike graces, was gentle, teachable, humble, submissive to his parents, and those set over him. And this may lead us to think how the young people of our own days have too often none of those graces, which should distinguish young people; the children are too often children no more,—in forwardness, in conceit, in insubordination, in want of respect for parents and elders, they are like persons three or four times as old as themselves: a very bad sign of the times, and only matching too well with others which we see around us. Who shall wonder that the children are no longer children, when the women are no longer women—when the graces of womanly character, modesty, retirement, reticence, unobtrusiveness, are freely thrown off, and the woman seeks to be as forward in public business, and in the conduct of public affairs, as the man? God grant the women of this country to remember that the highly favoured servant of God, of whom the Saviour was born, and whom we may reasonably suppose, without any undue and unscriptural exaltation of her, to have been the model of all feminine graces, is thrown by Holy Scripture (and no doubt threw herself), though she was God's instrument for conveying the greatest blessings to mankind, completely into the shade. And the children will follow the women—will take after the mother. They too will remember, and show by their manners that they remember, that the one great Example for us all lived thirty

years in retirement, helping His reputed father in a workshop, before he entered upon public life; and that it is specially recorded of Him in His childhood that He was a child indeed. Though "over all, God blessed for ever,"^b "the root" as well as "the offspring of David,"^c He humbled Himself to grow in wisdom,^d and submitted to receive instruction from the doctors in the temple, and having thus shown His respect for the spiritual pastors of the people, placed Himself lovingly under parental discipline;—"he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them."^e

^b Rom. ix. 5.

^c Rev. xxii. 16.

^d See S. Luke ii. 52.

^e S. Luke ii. 51.

CHAPTER X.

THE SIX PROPHETIC SONGS.

I SAM. II. I.

And Hannah prayed, and said.

OBERVE the word prayer, as applied to this song of Hannah's. It is not a prayer at all in the poor narrow sense in which we sometimes use the word. There is nothing asked of God in it from beginning to end. She had already asked for what she desired, and she had asked it privately, when no one knew but herself what she was doing. For we are told that Hannah, in praying before the Lord, "spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard."^a She had entered into the closet of her heart, and shut the door upon her domestic cares and troubles, and had prayed unto her "Father which is in secret."^b And her "Father which seeth in secret" had rewarded her "openly," by giving her the child she asked for. And her acknowledgment must be as public as His mercies. Therefore she bursts forth into a song of thanksgiving and praise, here called a prayer; for the homage, which we render to God thereby, being the principal thing in prayer, and more important

^a 1 Sam. i. 13.

^b See S. Matt. vi. 6.

than the mere asking Him for what we want, any such act of homage is in Scripture called prayer. "Hallowed be thy name" is prayer, quite as much as "Give us this day our daily bread."

She "said." But did she say it on the spur of the moment? Her prayer, or song, is a piece of poetry. Hebrew poetry is not in rhyme, as much of ours is; but nevertheless it is artificially constructed; it has its rules; there is a prosody in it, as well as a grammar. And can people, we are disposed to ask, compose poetry on the spur of the occasion? Yes; there are persons who can do so by a natural gift. Among the Italians it is no uncommon thing to find persons who can *improvise*—that is, pour forth strains of poetry without premeditation. And if this power may be had by a natural gift, much more, of course, may persons be made to receive and exercise it, whose minds are seized and taken possession of by the Holy Spirit of God. Such persons are lifted above themselves for a time, and express sentiments and use language loftier than the sentiments and language of daily life. Hannah was a prophetess, and in this very song^c prophesies of David and of Christ. How should she have spoken about David and Christ, unless God's Spirit, who can see into the future, had put words into her mouth? And if the Spirit could put words into her mouth, He could enable her to speak poetry on the spur of the moment.

St. Paul tells us that he compared "spiritual things with spiritual."^d And we can never hope to catch the full sense of any passage of Holy Scripture, without taking it in connexion with other pas-

^c See 1 Sam. ii. 10.

^d See 1 Cor. ii. 13.

sages of a similar import. Hannah's song is one of a series of songs uttered by women, and recorded for our instruction by the Holy Spirit; and accordingly it must be viewed as one link of a beautiful golden chain, the first link of which hangs upon the word of promise made to our first parents in the garden of Eden. This promise was that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head^e—that is, that some hero or champion, descended in some peculiar and remarkable way from a woman, should, after a severe conflict, in which the devil should inflict many blows upon him, crush the great enemy and utterly destroy his power. Now there are two great points in this promise. First, it speaks of a hard-fought battle and a victory. Next, it speaks of the woman's seed as conqueror. Through a woman the evil had made its entrance. Through a woman was He to come, who should triumph over the evil. Now five holy women of old, at quite different periods of history, took up this promise by faith, and spoke of it as in course of fulfilment. Eve herself, when Seth was born to her, seems to have been aware that the holy seed was to begin with Seth;—that in the line of Seth was to come Abraham, David, Christ. She had been disappointed by the cruel death of the righteous Abel; but now she sings—

“God hath appointed me another seed
Instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.”^f

Sarah, when Isaac was born to her in the extreme old age of herself and her husband, sings *her* Magnificat. “God hath made me to laugh,” says

^e See Gen. iii. 15.

^f Gen. iv. 25.

she (to laugh with holy glee and exultation;—compare “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion . . . then was our mouth filled with laughter”^g), “so that all that hear will laugh with me.”^h

Another link is the song of Miriam (or Mary) in the wilderness, which runs thus; “Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”ⁱ And here observe that, since the occasion of the song is not the birth of a child, but deliverance from an enemy, the point of the original promise, which is taken up and enlarged on, is the victory which the Lord’s right hand had won for His people. And yet it is a woman who stands forth to celebrate the victory; “Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron,” and others, who “went out after her with timbrels and with dances;”^j so that even here that other feature of the promise, which connected the deliverance with the woman, is not dropped.

This is even more markedly so in the song of Deborah. Here the victory over Sisera and the Canaanites, who for “twenty years” had “mightily oppressed the children of Israel,”^k is the occasion of the thanksgiving. But it is a chief feature in the song that the deliverance was wrought by the hands of a woman. “Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent.”^l

In this song of Hannah’s, which comes next in order, it is certainly observable that, though the occasion of it was the birth of Samuel, there

^g Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2.

^j Exodus xv. 20.

^h Gen. xxi. 6.

^k Judges iv. 3.

ⁱ Exodus xv. 21.

^l Judges v. 24.

is no other allusion to that circumstance but this vague and general one; "The barren hath borne seven:"^m while, on the other hand, the conflict with enemies and the victory over them is a great element in the song: "My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies;" "the bows of the mighty men are broken;" . . . "by strength shall no man prevail." "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed."ⁿ

St. Mary the Virgin's song, called the "Magnificat," embraces both points together—that of a triumph over God's enemies, and that of the woman's seed as the Conqueror. And she explicitly refers (as none of the other holy women do) to the promise, made indeed originally to Eve, but inherited by Abraham, and looked for in his family. These are her triumphant accents; "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats . . . the rich he hath sent empty away."^o And this her allusion to the Conqueror as sprung from a *woman*; "He hath regarded the low estate of his *handmaiden*."^p And this her reference to the promise, with which she most appropriately closes not her own song only, but the whole group of songs—Eve's, Sarah's, Miriam's, Deborah's, Hannah's, as well as her own; "He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."^q For it was God's precious

^m 1 Sam. ii. 5. ⁿ 1 Sam. ii. 1, 4, 9, 10. ^o S. Luke i. 51, 52, 53.

^p S. Luke i. 48.

^q S. Luke i. 54, 55.

promise, received by faith, and hailed through many generations in hope, which gave birth to all these songs, which tuned the hearts and voices of all these holy women. And therefore when, by the approaching birth of Christ, that promise is on the eve of fulfilment, most meet it is that the promise should be referred to; and St. Mary, in referring to it at the close of her song, sets to her seal that God is true.^r Not that God's promise was fully and finally completed by the *birth* of Christ. The Conqueror had still to live, to suffer, to die, to rise, to ascend, to send forth the Comforter. And still He has to come again; and not until He does come again will these triumphal songs of victory, through the seed of the woman, have their *complete* fulfilment. The final manifestation of the woman's seed crushing the serpent's head shall not be till Christ "shall have put down all rule and all authority and power,"^s and death and hell have been cast into the lake of fire,^t and His redeemed are welcomed by Him to the many mansions of His Father's house.^u

^r See S. John iii. 33.

^t See Rev. xx. 14.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 24.

^u See S. John xiv. 2, 3.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOUR PERFECTIONS OF GOD.

I SAM II. 1, 2, 3.

1. My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.

3. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

IT is surprising to us at first sight that Hannah says so little in this song of the gift which she has received from God, and for which she is returning thanks, and that what she does say bearing upon the subject is couched in general terms, which would suit the case of other people as well as her own. But the truth is that this holy woman looks above the gift to the Giver; she is not so much taken up with the joy of having obtained a child, and of thus being freed from the taunts of Peninnah, that she has no thought to give to Him, from whom all her blessings flow. Her song is throughout a celebration of the praises of God; and in the portion of it

which stands at the head of this Chapter she rehearses three of God's perfections.

1. She speaks of His *holiness*; "There is none holy as the Lord." St. Mary the Virgin echoes her, when in *her* song she says; "Holy is his name."^a The earliest meaning of the Hebrew word translated "holy" is "clean, pure." Sin is regarded as the defilement of the mind, just as uncleanness is a defilement of the body. And when God, or His name (that is, His character), is said to be holy, the meaning is that He is altogether free from sin, and absolutely good—perfectly just, perfectly true, perfectly loving. This would be a very sad thought for sinners, whose thoughts, and words, and actions are so unholy, were it not that our Lord Jesus Christ has atoned for our sins by His death, and has also in our nature led a perfectly holy life; and that, if we join ourselves to Him by faith, God looks at us through Him, and accepts us for His sake. Otherwise it would repel us from God, to think how holy a Being He is, and how eternally separate from sin. The lepers of old were driven out to live by themselves,^b and obliged to shun the society of sound and healthy persons. And we sinners should have been driven out from God's society for ever by the leprosy of our sins, were it not that Jesus Christ in our nature has been perfectly holy, and God, when we truly believe in Jesus, sets His holiness to our account.

2. Next Hannah speaks of *the power* of God. "Neither is there any rock," says she, "like our God." So St. Mary in her song calls God, "He that is mighty;" and says, "He hath showed

^a S. Luke i. 49.

^b See Lev. xiii. 46, and 2 Chron. xxvi. 21, and S. Luke xvii. 12.

strength with his arm.”^c In Moses’ song he had five times called God “the rock”^d of His people, because a rock is strong, sure, and immovable—you may build a house or castle upon it, and feel sure that the foundations are safely laid—you may hide yourself in the clefts of it when pressed by your enemies, and be secure from their arrows and bullets. So the people of God may securely trust in Him because of His great power. And now observe what particular exercise of God’s power both Hannah and St. Mary celebrated. It is this, that when men grow proud and ambitious, He immediately, to however great a height of power they may have reached, strikes them down. When the Babel builders said in the arrogance of their heart, “Let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name,”^e—God confounded their tongues and scattered them abroad on the face of the earth. When David thought, as he numbered the people and found their number like the sand on the seashore, “What a great king am I!”—God smote down seventy thousand of David’s subjects in one day.^f When Herod sat upon his throne in his royal robes, and made a very eloquent speech, and drank in greedily the flattering cry which came up from the audience, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man,” “immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory.”^g And so, when Hannah had spoken of God as a “rock,” she glances at what He had just done in humbling and silencing her rival, who had shown a boastful and contemptuous spirit: “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let

^c S. Luke i. 49, 51.^d Deut. xxxii. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31.^e Gen. xi. 4, 7.^f 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, 15.^g Acts xii. 21, 22, 23.

not arrogancy come out of your mouth; . . . by strength shall no man prevail;" and St. Mary, immediately after saying that God "hath shewed strength with his arm," adds, "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats."^h Two of Christ's Apostles quote from the Proverbs of Solomon the saying, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,"ⁱ and exhort us therefore to "submit ourselves to God," to "humble ourselves under his mighty hand." God's favourite way of displaying His power in the kingdom of Providence is to cast down the proud and lift up the humble. He who lifts himself up above others in the arrogance of his heart, attracts immediately the lightning of God's vengeance. How should we watch and pray against all boastfulness and vain glory!

3. The third attribute of God which Hannah speaks of is His *wisdom*. "The Lord," she says, "is a God of knowledge," and she gives this proof of it, that "by him actions are weighed." His knowledge reaches to the depths of the character; He is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."^j He does not take an action for a good one, because it looks good outside; but He lays it in the balance, examines minutely into its motives, and ascertains at once the value or the worthlessness of it. I have been to-day wholly engaged in the works of my calling,—very busy from morning to night. So far, so good; all is well with the outside; but how about the inside? Have I been doing my work mechanically, as a horse goes round in a mill; or doing it with some

^h S. Luke i. 51.

ⁱ See James iv. 6, 7, and 1 Pet. v. 5.

^j See Heb. iv. 12.

thought of God, with a desire and endeavour to do it faithfully under His eye, as the task which is set me by Him, and with prayer for His blessing upon it? "By him actions are"—not accepted immediately without examination, but—"weighed."—"I have been to Church or to Communion to-day; but perhaps I went not really to worship God, and converse with Him, and hear His voice, and seek His blessing; but because it is the fashion to go, and I am in the way of it; or because I am required to go, and my position and office oblige me to be there? Should I go, if I were not under such an obligation? The 'God of knowledge' knows; for 'by Him actions are'—not commended because of their fair outward show, but—'weighed.'"

It is interesting to observe that St. Mary in *her* song does not make any explicit mention of God's wisdom or knowledge, though she does mention twice over *another* attribute, of which Hannah makes no explicit mention. This is the fairest and most smiling of all God's attributes—His mercy, that is to say, His goodness to the undeserving and ill-deserving. Twice does the blessed Virgin celebrate this attribute; "His mercy is on them that fear him;" and again, "He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy."^k Hannah's song was delivered under the Law, while God's people were yet under that sterner and more severe dispensation, which designedly made them more acquainted with His holiness, and power, and wisdom, than with His love. But St. Mary's song, ushering in as it did the birth of Christ, could not possibly be without an allusion to the tender mercy of our God,—the

^k S. Luke i. 50, 54.

mercy which led Him to give His Son out of His bosom for the salvation of the lost.¹ In this, as well as in the fact that St. Mary celebrates the fulfilment of God's promise, which Hannah does not, because the birth of Samuel was not (like the birth of Christ) prophetically announced beforehand, we see that the two songs, though they have so very close a resemblance, yet at the same time are framed each of them with a special reference to the circumstances of the singer. Hannah's song, though it was the original of St. Mary's, would not suit St. Mary; nor would St. Mary's, though copied from Hannah's, suit Hannah. Each has its characteristic features. The more we study the Holy Scriptures, the more we shall see reason to believe that every word is weighed—that no word is wanting, that none could be spared—and that while every word has great breadth of meaning, and will apply to many different cases, each is beautifully apposite to the occasion on which it was first spoken.

[NOTES.—v. 1. *mine horn is exalted in the Lord.*—The word "horn" is often used in the Bible to denote *strength* and *honour*. The strength of animals,—of the deer, the ox, the rhinoceros, lies in their horns. Animals that have horns fight with them, and when they have gored or thrown their adversary, prance away tossing their horns in the air. Artificial horns are also used in the East, as a mark of honour and dignity of the person wearing them. Chieftains wear them, and (among the Druses of Mount Lebanon) married women. What Hannah means is: "God has given me *power* to meet the taunts of Peninnah, and has raised me to *honour*." This is the earliest passage of Holy Scripture in which the word "horn" is used in this figurative sense; and accordingly it should be noticed. The same language is found in the New Testament. God, says Zacharias (S. Luke

¹ See S. John iii. 16, and i. 18.

i. 69), "hath raised up an *horn of salvation* for us" (a mighty and glorious salvation) in the house of his servant David."

v. 2. *neither is there any rock like our God.*—It is observable that David makes mention of God as his "*rock*" and "*the horn of his salvation*" in one and the same verse of his song (see 2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3). It seems to show that David was acquainted with the song of Hannah. All the written Scriptures that he had, he prized and studied and laid to heart, and was so familiar with them that, when he himself was inspired to sing, he naturally expressed himself in the same language.]

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF PRIDE.

I SAM. II. 4, 5.

4. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

5. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

FROM the arrogant taunts of Peninnah, which had sunk so deep into her soul, and from the humiliation which she had undergone in consequence (all which was now reversed; for Hannah's star was now in the ascendant, and Peninnah's on the wane), Hannah takes occasion to speak *generally* of the abasing of the proud, and the exaltation of the lowly. From the consideration of a particular case she rises to the announcement of a general principle. The pride of conquest, the pride of abundance, no less than the pride of a numerous and healthy issue, must come down; and, on the other hand, the trampled serf must lift up his head, and the poverty-stricken drudge must inherit abundance, just as the solitary mother must have her house gladdened with

the laughter, and her heart with the love, of children.

First, *the pride of conquest*. "The bows of the mighty men are broken." There is no greater frustration of arrogant purpose, than when a powerful man draws a bow with his full strength, intending to drive the arrow into the heart of his enemy, and the bow, overstrained, snaps asunder in his hand. Such was the frustration of the purpose of the Midianites, who "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude,"^a by the stratagem of Gideon. Such was also the frustration of Sennacherib's purpose, when, before he could discharge an arrow against the holy city, the angel of death went up and down amongst his ranks, and "smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand."^b

Secondly, *the pride of abundance*. There is something very awful in what we are told by the prophet Ezekiel, that "the iniquity of Sodom was pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness."^c In that rich, well-watered plain the people became rich, luxurious, and indolent; there were very many citizens of the stamp of Dives among them.^d The prodigal son, in the earlier part of his career, had, through his father's liberality, that plentifulness of resources which led to pride, indolence, and vice.^e And the end of it was, that he was reduced so low as to hire himself out for a pittance, which only just saved him from starving; he thought of hiring himself out to his father, for bread to satisfy his cravings. "They that were full hired themselves out for bread; and they that were hungry ceased" (ceased, that is,

^a Judges vii. 12.

^b 2 Kings xix. 35.

^c Ezek. xvi. 49.

^d See S. Luke xvi. 19.

^e See S. Luke xv. 12, 13.

from work, having no longer any necessity for it), just as the poor widow of Zarephath had no more need to gather sticks, when Elijah came under her roof. "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail,"^f until the day that the Lord sent rain upon the earth.

Hannah leaves her own case to the last;—"the barren hath borne seven" (that is, a full number of children). It was a case which had occurred before in the history of her nation, and was now about to occur in her case, and should be repeated in the future. Sarah, her great ancestress, after waiting many a weary year for the promised issue, had at length borne Isaac.^g Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife, had, after a similar period of hope deferred, borne Joseph and Benjamin.^h Ruth, childless by her first husband, had borne to her second Obed, the grandfather of David.ⁱ In after times the barren Elisabeth bore St. John the Baptist to Zacharias the priest.^j There was a mystery in these births, the key to which is given to us by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians. The two women, Hagar and Sarah, he there tells us, represent allegorically the two covenants—the Jewish and the Christian.^k The Christian covenant seemed for a long time to be barren in its results; never did any religion seem so unlikely to succeed in making a large number of converts. Its first preachers were fishermen. Its earliest converts were common people, poor people, ignorant people, slaves; "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," were "called."^l The Founder of the religion was the re-

^f 1 Kings xvii. 14, 16. ^g Gen. xxi. 5, 6, 7. ^h Gen. xxx. 1, 22, 23, 24, and xxxv. 18. ⁱ Ruth iv. 13, 21. ^j S. Luke i. 7, 57.
^k Gal. iv. 21-end. ^l 1 Cor. i. 26.

puted son of a carpenter,^m and Himself plied that trade.ⁿ His Church was in its origin a Jewish sect, and looked upon by the Jews, themselves a despised people, as being a sect of heretics.^o The Gospel did not employ as its preachers eloquent men, or rich men, or influential men, nor did it appeal to arms; on the contrary, all the power and wisdom of the world were at its first appearance arrayed against it. One would have said it must have been crushed in its birth. But the power and wisdom of God made it fruitful—fruitful beyond any religion before or after it. The Law had been the religion of a single nation. But the Gospel was to subjugate the world; the law-loving Roman, the intellectual Greek, the fierce Barbarian, were all to own its sway. “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.”^p

One thing needs to be borne in mind in reading all those passages of the Bible which, like that before us, speak of great people, rich people, thriving and prosperous people being brought low; and again of low people, poor people, and unfortunate people as being raised up. Where there is grandeur, and riches, and prosperity, there is *the outward visible sign of pride*. And where, on the other hand, there is a low station, and poverty, and misfortune, there is *the outward visible sign of humility*. But it does not by any means follow that the thing signified uniformly goes with the outward sign. Many great persons are devout, like Daniel.^q Many rich persons are

^m S. Matt. xiii. 55. ⁿ S. Mark vi. 3. ^o Acts xxiv. 5.

^p Gal. iv. 27. ^q Dan. vi. 2, 10.

very humble-minded and pious, like Abraham.^r Many unfortunate people are thoroughly bad subjects, like the ungrateful cripple at the pool of Bethesda, who, after being made whole by our Lord, went and gave up his benefactor to the Jews.^s Prosperity and wealth and rank have a tendency to make a man proud, and very often, probably oftener than not, actually do so. It is not, however, the prosperity, or the wealth, or the rank that offends God, but the pride which these things are apt to foster. And, on the other hand, poverty by itself is not pleasing to God, but only that humble lowly state of mind which puts up with slights and injuries, and which seems to sit more naturally on poor people than on those who are blessed with abundance or high station. "Blessed be ye poor," says our Lord, in St. Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, "for yours is the kingdom of God."^t And St. Matthew, in his version of it, explains what sort of poverty was pronounced by our Lord to be blessed; "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."^u

It is pride which God resists and humbles, it is humility which He honours and exalts, whether in people of high or low condition. There may be pride in any and every condition of life. Children, as well as grown people, may be very proud; and God hates pride in the young as much as in the old. Some children,—nay, and some grown people too, are proud of fine clothes, and like to strut about while the gloss is new on their wearing apparel. Others are proud of being clever; whereas they should regard their talents as a

^r Gen. xiii. 2, and xviii. 19, and xxii. 16, 17, 18. ^s S. John v. 9, 15.

^t S. Luke vi. 20. ^u S. Matt. v. 3.

trust given them by God, of which they will have to render an account. Others are vain of their beauty; and then perhaps their beauty is taken away by some loathsome complaint, or worse still, it becomes a snare to them, as Absalom's fine long hair was the means of bringing him to his end.^v These are very different forms of pride from that of Herod in the Acts,^w or Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel;^x but it is only the circumstances of the people which are different; the principle is one and the same in all. Of all forms of pride, that which God hates most is spiritual pride—the pride which thinks within itself; “I am quite able to work out a righteousness of my own; I do not need to fall back much, if at all, upon my Saviour's righteousness, or upon the cleansing power of His blood.” Oh, this is the pride of prides, which must be thoroughly rooted out of the heart, before a single grace or virtue can grow there; for faith is the root of all graces and virtues, and there can be no faith without a sense of sin; and just in proportion to the liveliness of that sense in each one of us will be the power of our faith. And a lively sense of sin is the death of spiritual pride.

[NOTES.—*v.* 5. *the barren hath born seven.*—Seven is often used in the Bible for a full and perfect number. It signifies completeness, because in six days God created the world, and rested on the seventh (Gen. ii. 1, 2).—*She that hath many children is waxed feeble.*—“The Jews feign that for every child that was born to Hannah two of Peninnah's died.”—*The Speaker's Commentary.*]

^v See 2 Sam. xviii. 9, 14, 15. ^w See Acts xii. 22, 23.

^x Dan. iv. 30.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GOD OF NATURE ALSO THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE
AND OF GRACE.

I SAM. II. 6, 7, 8.

6. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

7. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

8. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them.

THE first of these verses sets forth that God has absolute power over human *life*. He it is, who makes pale with mortal disease the once ruddy cheek of health and beauty. He it is, again, who snatches a man from the jaws of death, when his recovery seems beyond all hope.

The seventh verse and the first part of the eighth set forth God's absolute power over human *circumstances*. He it is, who gives a fortune to one, and reduces another to beggary. He it was, who shattered Nebuchadnezzar's reason, and made him herd with the beasts;^a He who brought Joseph out of the dungeon, and made him ride in the second chariot which King Pharaoh had.^b

^a Dan. iv. 33, 34.

^b Gen. xli. 14, 43.

All these are instances of God's power in *Providence*,—in the management of human affairs.

And now observe how Hannah passes on to speak of the power of God in *Nature*; "for," she adds, "the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

The earth is spoken of as if it were a great temple or palace, held up by pillars like the house of Dagon—firm and settled, so long as those pillars remain unshaken, but sure to fall into ruin the moment the pillars are thrown down.^c This may be, and probably is, a mere figure. It is not at all necessary to suppose that Hannah thought that the earth was a great wide plain, propped up by pillars. If she did, what must she have supposed the pillars to rest upon? It reminds us of a fanciful Hindu notion of the way in which the earth is supported. It was supposed to be held up by three elephants, which stand on the back of a tortoise, while eight other elephants, standing upon the earth, hold up the great vault of heaven. The tortoise stands upon an enormous serpent, which is coiled round both the earth and heaven, his head and tail meeting one another at the top of the picture. Of course this view of the way in which the earth is supported, if understood literally, is pure nonsense. No heathen, however unenlightened and uninstructed, could possibly suppose that such was really the case. We must suppose then that the whole representation is figurative, and thus we can see some sense in it. The elephant with his enormous strength, the tortoise with its hard durable shell, represent the wonderful power which, amidst all changes and decay, preserves the framework of

^c See Judges xvi. 26. 29, 30.

nature in existence. The serpent, twining round the whole in one vast coil, represents eternity, and is intended to denote (what we know from God's word to be false, but what a heathen might very naturally suppose to be the case) that the heaven and earth will last for ever. There is a solidity and stability about the earth, which might reasonably give the impression, unless God had told us to the contrary, that it will be eternal.—Now we may take Hannah's expression in the same way, as a figurative one, meaning not that the earth does literally stand upon pillars, but that the mighty God, who created it, upholds it every instant by an act of His will; and that, if that act of will were for a moment withdrawn, it would drop at once into that nothingness, out of which it was drawn by creation. In the Book of Job, which is supposed to be considerably earlier than the time of Samuel, we find it distinctly mentioned, as a wonderful effect of God's power, that the earth has nothing to rest upon; "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing;"^d and yet further on in the book, God Himself speaks of the earth figuratively, as if it was a building with a corner-stone and foundation. "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?" (literally, "whereupon are the sockets thereof made to sink?" as much as to imply that one of the marvels of the earth is that it has no foundation to rest upon); "or who laid the corner-stone thereof?"^e

Hannah, then, according to this view of her meaning, adds to the instances she has given of God's power in Providence this wondrous instance of His power in Nature,—that He supports the

^d Job xxvi. 7.

^e Job xxxviii. 6, and *margin*.

earth, keeps it in its place with as much stability as if it were a building held up by pillars. Science since Hannah's time has taught us the way in which God does this—namely, by the law of gravitation, which, as the earth pursues its course in space, pulls it in every moment towards the sun; but assuredly the operation is not less wonderful, because we happen to have found out the principle on which it is conducted. An enormous globe made up of land and water, floating in space, and poised on nothing,—it is indeed a marvel of God's power.

And now pray observe the force of the FOR in the words—"for the pillars" (the sustaining, preserving power) "of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

No wonder, she means to say, that God does such great things, brings about such strange vicissitudes in the life and fortunes of feeble men. FOR only see what tremendous irresistible forces He is always exerting in Nature. No wonder He has such power over the inhabitants of the earth, who are swept away from it in shoals, one generation after another, if, like a great Atlas, He carries the whole globe, as it were, on His stalwart shoulders.—Now this gives rise to one or two edifying thoughts. The God of Providence, Hannah asserts, is the God of Nature also; and His ways in Nature, she implies, seem to us to be more amazing and stupendous than His ways in Providence. I say *seem* to us to be,—not that in reality they are so. And why is this? Why do God's works in Providence strike us with much less wonder than His works in Nature? I suppose because we are comparatively so familiar with His works of Providence; life and death, health and

sickness, the rise in one man's fortunes and the fall in another's, are around us on all sides ; and, being matter of every day's experience, make slight impressions. Another reason is, that we ourselves have some part in bringing about results in Providence ; a man can bring himself to the gates of the grave by carelessness of his health, or may recover by the skill of the physician—may make a fortune by assiduous industry, or may lose one by neglect of his accounts and wasteful expenditure ; but no man can arrest the sun in his course, or shake the earth to its foundations, or keep the planets in their respective places, or draw the veil of night over the earth, or bring about the dawn an hour earlier than it would appear in the natural course of things. Because we have free wills, and these wills can do something in altering our own condition and circumstances, we are too apt to forget God's agency in these matters, and to imagine that we have the control of things in our own hands. Whereas, if we could see the truth of things, we should acknowledge that He overrules even our most perverse actions to His own ends, and that He can "order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men,"^f more hard to control than the stormy sea.

The lesson is, that we should try more and more to regard the God of Nature and of Providence as one, and to throw those notions of magnificence and power, which we derive from Nature, into other spheres of God's action,—into the sphere of God's Providence and also of His Grace. Do I see design on every side of me in Nature, wise contrivance for the wellbeing of

^f Collect for fourth Sunday after Easter.

the creatures? Let me be assured that in human affairs also this same wise design is contriving and arranging all things, with a moral aim, for the exaltation of the humble, the humiliation of the proud, and the highest good to them that love God. Do I see magnificence, and marvellous reaches of power, on every side of me in Nature? Then let me be assured that this power is much more able to control my affairs, and to bring good (and even comfort) out of the bitterest dispensations. Let me be assured that the Gospel is an irresistible power unto salvation to all who believe and obey it,—that it brings forces into action, which can wash away the blackest guilt, purify the corruptest heart, rectify the most depraved will, can draw up the worst sinner out of the dunghill of his sins, make him one of the lights of the world, and crown him hereafter with the diadem of glory.

[NOTES.—*v.* 8. The very words of the first part of this verse are found again in Psalm cxiii. 7, 8. And it is there added (*v.* 9): “He maketh *the barren woman* to keep house, and to be a *joyful mother of children.*” The Psalmist is evidently thinking about Hannah, and quoting from her song.]

CHAPTER XIV.

HANNAH'S SELF SUPPRESSED IN HANNAH'S SONG.

I SAM. II. 9, 10.

9. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

10. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

HANNAH'S song falls into three divisions, the last of which begins with verse 9. In the first part she speaks of what God had done in the past; "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength . . . the barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble."^a In the second, she casts her eyes not behind, but around her, and observes that God is doing at present much the same sort of things as He did in time past. He "killeth, and maketh alive; maketh poor, and maketh rich; bringeth low, and lifteth up."^b In the third part, she looks forward in hope to the future, and finds the future brighter and more glorious than the past or the present.

^a 1 Sam. ii. 4, 5.

^b 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7.

God had wrought wonderful things, both in the past and in the present. Still, in the past and the present evil was not gotten rid of; there was always something fighting against God and resisting Him; the enemies of the Lord, once crushed, raise their heads again. The great triumph of God and of righteousness is reserved for the future; and it will be a crushing triumph; "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." The works of God, which Hannah celebrates, fill the past, the present, and still more the future, as being works of "him which is, and which was, and which is to come."^c And the great theatre of His works, in which this song invites us to become spectators of them, is the theatre of human life and character.

"He will keep the feet of his saints." A man's conduct in Scripture is called his walk, or his goings. As it is very easy, in walking hastily and carelessly, to slip and get a bad fall, so in our every-day conduct, if we are not watchful over our thoughts and words, and on our guard against temptation, it is only too easy to go wrong, and to fall into serious sin. I say, it is necessary to be watchful, and to use our best endeavours to keep ourselves, if we would avoid a fall. But even our best endeavours will not secure us, without the Divine guardianship. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."^d We are told that God "is able to keep" us "from falling."^e And in this verse He promises to do so; "He will keep the feet of his saints." And

^c Rev. i. 4.^d Psalm cxxvii. 1.^e See Jude 24.

on the ground of this and similar promises the Psalmist prays; "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."^f Say that prayer from your heart before going forth to your daily work. And while you are doing the work, watch your mind and your mouth continually, trying to keep them right. And you shall assuredly be kept, though the ground may be full of snares around you.—"And the wicked shall be silent in darkness." This cannot be said of the present state of things, when the wicked, so far from being silent and in darkness, lift up their heads, and come forward in the light of day, and use all manner of defiant and insolent speech. "For by strength," by his own natural strength and resources, to which the wicked has trusted, and of which he has made boast, "shall no man prevail."

"The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces,"—like a potter's vessel, the shivered fragments of which can never be put together again; "out of heaven shall he thunder upon them," dismaying and discomfiting them utterly, as further on in the book (chap. vii.) we find the Philistines "smitten before Israel," when "the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon"^g them: "the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth,"—a prophecy of the universal judgment of all nations at the end of time, which, as St. Jude tells us, had been predicted long ages before Hannah's time by the patriarch Enoch; "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all."^h And the final judgment of the nations implies undoubtedly that the nations will have had some knowledge communicated to them of God's ways

^f Psalm xvii. 5.^g 1 Sam. vii. 10.^h Jude 14, 15.

and works of grace; that there will have been a preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, and a call of them into the Church; "and he shall give strength unto his king;" to Saul and David in the first instance; both of whom were to be anointed by Samuel kings over Israel; and both of whom, though the latter much more effectively than the former, were to gain great victories over the Philistines, and other enemies of the chosen people; "and exalt the horn of his anointed;"—a prophecy of David in the first instance, whom God took from the sheepfold,¹ and raised to a throne, and made him "a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth."¹ But these prophecies look beyond David to our blessed Lord, who was God's king set upon His holy hill of Zion,^k and to whom the Lord God gave the throne of his father David,¹ beneath whose feet God is even now putting all things,^m and who will be manifested to all eyes at the last day as Judge of quick and dead,ⁿ ruling with a rod^o of iron those to whom His golden sceptre of grace^p has been held out in vain, and as triumphant over death, sin, and Satan, whom He will fling into the lake of fire.^q So that Hannah in this last clause of the song is really only reciting in another form the later articles of the Apostles' Creed; He "sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. . . . I believe in the holy Catholick Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting."

¹ See Psalm lxxviii. 70. ¹ 2 Sam. vii. 9. ^k See Psalm ii. 6.

¹ See S. Luke i. 32. ^m See 1 Cor. xv. 25, 27, and Heb. ii. 8.

ⁿ See Acts x. 42. ^o See Psalm ii. 9, and Rev. ii. 27. ^p See

Esther iv. 11. ^q See Rev. xx. 10, 14.

We have now gone through the song of Hannah. In looking back upon it for a moment, what feature of it strikes us most? Surely it is the very brief and meagre reference which Hannah makes to her own circumstances. "The barren hath borne seven" seems to be the single passage which contains an allusion to herself. So marked is this feature of the song, that some very shallow critics have held that it could not have been uttered by Hannah herself, but must have been composed upon a different occasion. But the truth is that Hannah, who is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God, is lifted beyond and above herself, to think and speak of the great deliverances of His own people, which God is always bringing about in human history, and which will shine forth most brilliantly at the end of all things. She speaks, not merely as the mother of Samuel, but as a mother in Israel,—a patriot, who has greatly at heart the interests of her own people and of the Church of God. Not that she did not feel deeply the mercy she had herself received; her whole story shows, on the contrary, that she was a sensitive woman, sensitive to slights and insults, and, if so, sensitive also to kindnesses and mercies,—“My heart rejoiceth,” she says at the outset; “my horn is exalted,”—but she soon passes out of herself to speak of the glorious hopes of her nation—how the expected Deliverer of mankind should rise out of it, and how *His* “horn” should be “exalted” over His enemies in final victory and triumph. And what a lesson this teaches us,—a lesson we are all slow to learn,—about our prayers! We are apt to be very selfish in our prayers; we care very little about others when we pray, however closely we

may be connected with them; nothing at all about our country, and the church to which we belong. The State prayers, as they are called, do not interest us; we think them cold and dry. And why? Only because we have scarcely any sympathy with our rulers in Church and State, and, so long as we get our own wants supplied, are almost indifferent what happens to them. We say, "Thy kingdom come . . . Thy will be done on earth," when we recite the Lord's Prayer, because the Lord has put the words into our mouth; but we do not feel, while we say them, the slightest interest in Church Missions, whether at home or abroad, nor the slightest wish that they may prosper. This selfishness utterly spoils our sincerest prayers for ourselves. We must pray in love—in a large, liberal spirit,—as well as in faith, if we desire to be heard. We must consider the wants of others as well as our own. And the only way to do this is to seek to pray in the same spirit which inspired Hannah's song. Never use stated prayer, without asking in the first instance that the Spirit of grace and of supplications may be poured upon you.^r He is the Spirit of love, and will make your heart expand towards others while you pray; so that, in asking for and acknowledging blessings on their behalf, you will for a while forget yourself, and be raised to a higher level of thought and feeling.

^r See Zech. xii. 10.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO NEW NOTES IN HANNAH'S DEVOTION.

I SAM. I. II.

O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid.

I SAM. II. IO.

He shall exalt the horn of his anointed.

HANNAH was a great prophetess,—a woman inspired by God to speak His truth. Of what she said and sung as a prophetess very little remains; but what does remain is of great significance. “The oracles of God”^a are all of them both brief and full; they wrap up a great deal of meaning in the fewest possible words. From Hannah's lips we first learn two names of the highest importance, which often occur in Holy Scripture after her time, but never before. In praying to God, she calls Him “the Lord of hosts.” In prophesying of Christ she calls Him the Lord's Anointed, or Messiah.

“The Lord of hosts.” The Psalmists, those sweet singers of Israel, who express every emotion of the devout mind, and all the Prophets,

^a Rom. iii. 2.

with the single exception of Ezekiel, use this title of Almighty God frequently; and to us Christians it is made familiar by its occurrence in the hymn called "Te Deum;" "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," or hosts; but it was Hannah who struck the first note; for the title is never found in the Books of Moses, nor in Joshua, Judges, or Ruth. Let us consider for a moment what a magnificent title it is. "Hosts" means "armies," and the God of hosts is the God of armies. The title first appears at an appropriate period of Israel's history. The Books of Samuel record the first establishment of the kingdom of Israel. Samuel, who anointed both Saul and David, may be called the founder of the monarchy. Now when the people insisted upon having a king, like other nations, one of the reasons which they gave for their request was, "that our king may go out before us, and fight our battles."^b Hitherto God had gone forth with their armies, and fought their battles for them, as He did when they conquered Sihon^c and Og,^d and when the walls of Jericho fell down flat before them, while they merely marched round,^e and when city after city of the Canaanites fell into Joshua's hand,^f and afterwards when the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword before Barak.^g On every occasion the promise had been fulfilled; "The Lord thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee."^h But they wanted

^b 1 Sam. viii. 20. ^c See Deut. ii. 32, 33, etc. ^d See Deut. iii. 1, 2, 3, etc. ^e See Josh. vi. 20. ^f See Josh. x. ^g See Judges iv. 14, 15. ^h Deut. ix. 3.

a king who could be seen, with a body-guard round him, one who should go forth in a magnificent chariot before their army, with his standard-bearer, and all the ensigns of royalty, and encourage them to follow. They had no faith. They could not rely upon a power which they did not see, however great and glorious were the things which that power had done for them in their past history. And now the time was rapidly approaching, when a king who could be seen was to be placed at the head of their army. It was surely very proper that just at this time a title of Almighty God should make its appearance, which might remind them continually that He was the real giver of victory in their battles, that they must not trust in their bow, neither was it their sword that could save them, but that it was God who saved them from their enemies, and put them to shame that hated them.¹ Unless He, the invisible King, went forth, as heretofore, at the head of their host, they could have no success. And the grand title "Lord of hosts" would serve to remind them of this.

But while the original allusion in this title was to the army of the state, and to the king as its natural leader, it soon gained a much higher and fuller meaning. The name soared above the occasion which gave rise to it. God is the God, not only of the armies of men, but of all armies everywhere. We read in the Book of Daniel that "he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven."¹ This may mean the army of the holy angels, who are described in the Epistle to the Hebrews as "an innumerable company of angels,"^k and again in the Book of the

¹ See Psalm xliv. 6, 7.

¹ Dan. iv. 35.

^k Heb. xii. 22.

Revelation as "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."¹ Again, by the "host of heaven" is sometimes meant in Scripture the stars, those bright jewels of the firmament, which are scattered with such profusion over all the realms of space, and of which God said to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them;"^m and to the prophet Jeremiah, "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured."ⁿ Coming to other districts of the universe, all the tribes of animated nature are God's hosts, all those swarms and hordes of insects which produce such dreadful effects upon the fruits and green things of the earth, although each of them by itself is very small and insignificant. Thus in the book of the prophet Joel a great swarm of locusts, which turned the whole country into a desolate wilderness, is spoken of as God's army, and as immediately under His orders; "And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great."^o All which teaches us that our ideas of God should be great, lofty, and magnificent ideas. He has vast armies under His command, which move at His bidding, and are absolutely under His control,—armies of angels, armies of men, armies of stars, armies of insects. Space is a great element in our ideas of grandeur. So is number. And God is the God of space and the God of number. He fills heaven and earth.^p He is the Lord of hosts, or armies,—armies rational and irrational, animate and inanimate.

But no true prophet ever spoke of God without speaking also of Christ. "The testimony of Jesus

¹ Rev. v. 11. ^m Gen. xv. 5. ⁿ Jer. xxxiii. 22. ^o Joel ii. 11.

^p See Jer. xxiii. 24.

is the spirit of prophecy.”^q And, as Zacharias the priest said, when he was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied, The “horn of salvation” (that is, the mighty or strong salvation—the strength of animals being in their horns), which God “raised up for us in the house of his servant David,” has been the theme of all “his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.”^r Hannah, therefore, being a prophetess, must speak of Christ. And she is the first inspired person who speaks of Him under the name so familiar to us,—the name of Messiah, or Christ, that is, the anointed One. “God,” says she, “shall exalt the horn of his Messiah,” that is, shall give to His Messiah overwhelming power and victory, shall put all things under Messiah’s feet. Now we know in what way God anointed Jesus of Nazareth,^s and what was the result of this anointing. He was anointed with the Holy Ghost, when by the Holy Ghost He was conceived in the Virgin’s womb;^t and again at His baptism, when “the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him.”^u And the first words He read aloud in the synagogue of Nazareth declared Him to have received this anointing; “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me.”^v And for what end, and with what result, was Christ thus anointed? St. Peter tells us He was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.^w Power of what kind? power to do what? to produce what effects? Was it power to crush, to overwhelm, to destroy? Yes! to crush man’s enemies, sin, and death, and Satan,^x in order that He might save

^q Rev. xix. 10.^r S. Luke i. 69, 70.^s See Acts x. 38.^t S. Matt. i. 20.^u S. Luke iii. 22.^v S. Luke iv. 18.^w Acts x. 38.^x See Gen. iii. 15.

man and raise him up from the ruins of the fall. His power was shown in doing good to men, in making the sick whole, in casting out evil spirits, or, in the very words of St. Peter, in healing all that were *tyrannized over* by the devil.^y A marvellous moral power attended on His words, which was even more wonderful than the natural power shown in His miracles. The broken-hearted were gladdened by the tidings of great joy which He announced to them; sin's captives were delivered; the spiritually blind recovered their sight; and they that were bruised by the bondage of Satan were set at liberty.^z And having broken the power of the enemy in His lifetime, He broke it still more effectually by the atoning sacrifice of His death. That death accomplished, His "horn" was "exalted" in His resurrection from the dead, and again in His ascension, and again in the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, whereby He strengthened His Apostles to carry on His work of victory over sin and Satan. And it shall be finally exalted, when God hath put all enemies under His feet,^a and death and hell at His second Advent are flung into the lake of fire.^b

Thus does Hannah travel on in her prophetic foresight to the end of all things. And thus much of significance and instruction is there in those titles of God and Christ, which come to us in the first instance from her lips.

^y Acts x. 38, *καταδυναστευομένου.*

^a See 1 Cor. xv. 25, 26.

^z See S. Luke iv. 18.

^b See Rev. xx. 14.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEARER THE CHURCH, THE FURTHER FROM GOD.

I SAM. II. II to end of 17.

11. And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.

12. Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.

13. And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand;

14. And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the flesh-hook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

15. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.

16. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.

17. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

SAMUEL was to be brought to the tabernacle and left there, as soon as he was weaned. Probably this means as soon as he could do without a nurse. If this is the meaning, he would be

about six or seven years old when his mother gave him up, and the sacred precinct of the tabernacle at Shiloh became his home. If literal weaning is meant, he could not, according to Jewish practice, have been more than three years old at the outside. Anyhow he was very young; if not absolutely an infant, yet a child, a little boy. And yet it is said he "ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest," that is, under Eli's own eye. And why not? When our Lord cured the blind and the lame in the temple, he was surrounded by children who cried and said, "Hosanna to the son of David!"^a He graciously accepted this tribute of praise, and quoted the Psalms to show that God accepted it.^b Even supposing him to be only three, Samuel was not too young to repeat some of the words of prayer and praise which his mother had taught him at home, or which Eli taught him. And praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God reckons the perfection of praise.^c If he was as much as seven, Samuel could help Eli in the services of the house of God, as a Levite was bound to help a priest,—could feed the lamps with oil, fetch the incense, open the doors of the tabernacle in the morning, and shut them at night, and perhaps sweep the court and keep it clean. And all this, being done in and for God's house, would be ministration unto the Lord. And though the tabernacle has passed away, young children may minister unto the Lord in His house of prayer still. We read of the prophets and teachers at Antioch, long after the Christian Dispensation was set up, that "they ministered to the Lord and fasted;"^d ministered to Him in public worship

^a S. Matt. xxi. 15.

^c S. Matt. xxi. 16.

^b S. Matt. xxi. 16.

^d See Acts xiii. 2.

and Sacraments, or, as we should say, held Divine Service. Choristers minister unto the Lord when they sing parts of the service, or lay out the Anthem music, or collect alms, or do any little office in connexion with the house of God; and it should be a great encouragement to them, as well as make them very reverent in what they do, to remember that their work is done not only "before Eli," that is, under the eye of those who are set over them as superiors, but that it is an actual service done to the Lord Jesus Christ, who stands unseen in the midst of the two or three gathered together in His name.^e How greatly He values the praise which comes from the hearts and lips of children, who shall say? It seems a beautiful picture,—this of little Samuel ministering to the Lord before Eli the priest. We fancy the child so safe where he is, so pure, so innocent, so far removed from all taint and breath of evil. In very lovely countries, we naturally think of the inhabitants as simple-minded and good. In God's house, where everything that we see and hear reminds us of God, we naturally think of the persons employed as reverent and devout people, who have their hearts in their work. But in this bad world it is impossible to keep sin out, so long as you let men in. No place, no occupation, no pursuit, but what is full of sin and mischief and danger. If you had been in that little company of eight souls, saved from the flood in Noah's ark,^f you would have had profane, irreverent, undutiful Ham talking coarsely to you, and whispering his immodesties into your ears.^g Nay, and if you had been an Apostle and had sat down to meat

^e See S. Matt. xviii. 20.

^f See Gen. vii. 13, and 1 Peter iii. 20.

^g See Gen. ix. 22.

every day with our Lord and St. Peter and St. John, you would have come under the influence of worldly-minded, false-hearted Judas. If little Samuel, when under the shelter of God's house, and in Eli's charge, may seem to have been spiritually in a garden of Eden, there were venomous snakes lying hid amongst the grass and flowers. Where can a young boy be safe from contamination? Everybody who knows anything about schools will say unhesitatingly, "Not among other boys." But supposing that he is placed among his elders, that he has none but grown men around him, and that these grown men are ministers of religion, bound by their profession to instruct others in the way of the Lord;—will not the child be safe enough then? These were exactly Samuel's circumstances; and yet Samuel was in the utmost danger, and was only preserved by that grace of God, which can maintain itself in the heart in spite of a thousand bad influences. The wicked sons of Eli, whom of course Samuel must often have seen and conversed with, did all they could to dishonour and profane God's ordinances. In the sacrifices of peace-offerings, a great many of which were offered, it was prescribed by the law that the breast and shoulder should be the perquisite of the priests;^h that the internal fat should be burned upon the altarⁱ as being the Lord's portion, and belonging to Him by right;^j and that the rest of the body of the victim should be partaken of by the offerer and his family.^k These wicked priests, however, insisted on having for themselves, not only the breast and shoulder, but as much of the remainder as a large three-pronged

^h Lev. vii. 31, 32.^j Lev. iii. 16.ⁱ Lev. vii. 31.^k Lev. vii. 15, 16.

fork thrust into the caldron, in which the flesh was being cooked, would bring up. Thus they were guilty of extortion towards the people. But this extortion was preceded by an act of sacrilege towards God. They not only took what they had no right to, but claimed what they had a right to before their turn came. The regular and reverent method of offering a peace-offering was, that first the Lord should have his portion, the fat being burned upon the altar as the earliest part of the ceremony. Then the priest was to take his portion, the breast and right shoulder. And lastly, the offerer was to carry off the remainder, and feast upon it with his family. The sons of Eli, however, would not observe this method. They insisted upon having their portion before God had His. And if the offerer yielded meekly to their demand upon himself, only begging them to be particular to give God his due in the first place, and to see that the internal fat was properly burned, their servant had instructions not to comply with the request, but to take the meat by violence, if there was need for so doing, before the fat was removed. And these men, it is added in the following part of the Chapter, were not only irreligious, but immoral men. Persons are occasionally found who, while thoroughly ungodly, are yet, as far as we can see, virtuous; but these priests were thoroughly vicious, as well as thoroughly ungodly. Alas! poor Hannah! your heart on your return to Ramah is very sore and sad, away from your little one; and much do you yearn for him, and count the days, as you weave the little coat, until the time shall come round to go up to Shiloh and pay him your annual visit. But you take comfort,

when you think how safe he is where he is; and how Eli will give him many a holy lesson; and how the Lord will surely bless him. And so indeed it all turned out. But little did you think of the danger he was running from the example and influence of wicked men, and from seeing holy things profaned day by day. However, you knew doubtless that natural innocence could not shield the boy, and therefore, as sooner or later evil must cross his path, you prayed earnestly for him that God's grace might guard him, and keep him reverent, and dutiful, and pure, and good. And it must needs be a great encouragement to Christian parents, who, in sending their children to school, have to place them amidst they know not what associates, to observe that your prayers were fully answered, and that Samuel grew to be a holy boy, and a holy man of God, in the very thick of evil influences. Let your child be fenced with your prayers, parent, and he shall not stray; or, if he stray, he shall come back again to the fold.

But what was it that made the sin of the wicked priests so offensive to the Lord? It was that the effect of it was to disgust the people of God with the ordinances of God's house; "the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." Lay clerks, choristers, priests, and all engaged professionally in the worship of the Church, lay this to heart. Our familiarity with sacred things, the repetition of prayers and psalms and lessons every morning and evening, is too apt to breed familiarity and irreverence,—to make us slovenly, inattentive, drowsy. The mischief this will do to our own souls is bad enough. The dishonour it

will do to God is worse still. But we should consider that by such conduct we are scandalizing those who attend our services, with perhaps a sincere desire to gain edification from them. We are placing a snare in the way of others,—about the greatest sin of which any one can be guilty,—chilling their wish, throwing back their effort to be devout, leading them to look with contempt and dislike upon a service gabbled over rapidly, or droned out drowsily,—to “abhor the offering of the Lord.” God forgive to each one of us, so far as we have contributed to it, this sin in the past, and deliver us from it by His grace in the future!

[NOTES.—*v. 12. sons of Belial.*—See note on Ch. i. 16, above, p. 41.

v. 15. he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.—It appears that the people were in the habit of boiling their portion of the sacrifice. The priests said they preferred to roast *their* portion. This, however, was a frivolous pretext, as they might have roasted the shoulder and breast, to which they were undoubtedly entitled. When they can find absolutely no plea for a wrong action, bad men will bolster it up with the most foolish of excuses.]

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LINEN EPHOD AND THE LITTLE COAT.

I SAM. II. 18, 19.

18. But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.

19. Moreover, his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

WHAT a force there is in this little particle "but." It contrasts Samuel's youthful piety with the wickedness of the grown-up sons of Eli, whom in all probability he would meet and speak to daily. There was iniquity all around him—iniquity in holy things. The services of the tabernacle were conducted in such a manner that the people were thoroughly disgusted and scandalized;—"men abhorred the offering of the Lord." The third commandment was broken openly, the very ministers of religion treating sacred things with profaneness, and wresting away from God for their own use what He had a special claim upon. The seventh commandment was broken, these wicked priests being shamelessly unchaste. The eighth commandment was broken by their extortion, as they

robbed the people of those parts of the victims which belonged to the offerer. And last, but not least, the fifth commandment was broken, since, so far from honouring their father Eli, we are told that, when he too mildly remonstrated with them about their wicked lives, "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father."^a But as the brightest lights are seen in nature side by side with the deepest shadows, so it was in God's tabernacle. Miraculously preserved, as one may say, by Divine grace, little Samuel fulfilled the tasks which Eli set him with reverence and godly fear, and at the same time maintained upon his heart the spell of home affection,—was a holy child, and also a dutiful child. First, he "ministered before the LORD, being a child." Do not overlook the force of these last words. It will be remembered how it was said of Samuel, when he was first brought to the tabernacle and dedicated to God, that "the child was young;" by which, as I then said, was meant not young in years only, but in character; he had the characteristic graces of children,—lowliness, teachableness, innocence, simplicity. And so here we are told that he retained these graces, notwithstanding the wickedness with which he was surrounded, and which might have hardened him, and made him acquainted with evil, coarse, irreverent, and undutiful. Behold, in the midst of it all, "Samuel ministered before the Lord" *as* "a child." It was not simply that he being a child ministered, but that he ministered as a child—threw into his ministrations all that guilelessness, simplicity, docility, modesty, which finds such favour with the Lord. "Girded with a linen ephod." A

^a 1 Sam. ii. 25.

linen ephod was the dress of the *ordinary* priests. The high priest wore a more sumptuous ephod, which had the breastplate fastened in front of it. Samuel was not a priest by birth, but only a Levite. But possibly he wore a priestly robe in childhood to mark him out as one who in due time was to be called by God in an extraordinary manner to the priesthood; for we find him in after life offering sacrifices, which was the office of the priest, and which Samuel never would have undertaken, had not God called him to it. The position of Samuel in the tabernacle was now very similar to that which choristers hold in the Christian Church. They are not ordained—not as yet regular ministers of God. And yet they are employed in ministerial offices, and in offices which are by no means unimportant. They lead the singing, as the clergy lead the prayers. And just as the reverence with which the prayers are said has a great effect in inducing the congregation to pray, so the reverence with which psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are sung is likely to have more effect than many sermons in warming the hearts of people towards the holy and beautiful worship of God, and making them feel a living interest in it. Choristers, too, wear the dress, in which among ourselves religious ministrations are performed,—the surplice. And that dress should remind them, when they put it on, that, when we appear before God, to worship Him, we should come before Him in a garment of righteousness not our own (for that righteousness of our own is like filthy rags,^b not like clean white linen), but resting upon our Saviour's righteousness by faith, and so having His merits

^b See Isaiah lxiy. 6.

imputed to us. Choristers, lastly, may become ministers of God in due time. Many of those, who have begun by being choristers, have in later life become eminent clergymen. Probably it is open to any chorister to become a clergyman. For if one of them were really minded to serve God in the ministry of the Church, surely a way would be opened for him to do so, and his friends would come forward to help him in getting the required education. But observe, further, what seems to be implied in this passage, that Samuel, while young, was careful to keep up the outward signs of reverence. He did not appear in the tabernacle to sing, or to do any of the tasks set him by Eli, without first girding himself with his linen ephod, which he threw over the little coat that his mother made for him. There are some boys, and I fear some grown men too, who think that, so long as the heart is right in God's house, outward things do not signify at all. It does not matter, they think, how slovenly and untidy, and even dirty, their dress is, when they come to church, nor whether they sit or kneel, nor whether in singing they stand upright, or loll about and lean on the desks. Let me ask such persons this question; Would they think of behaving so if they went to Court? Supposing that they had to do their homage to the Queen, would they go to the palace in an untidy, slovenly dress, or would they wear the best apparel which they could afford to get? And, again, would they throw themselves into a chair, and sit at their ease, while other people were doing their homage, or stand up respectfully, and bow or kneel when it came to their turn? If every one would certainly do the latter, and avoid doing

the former, why are we to show less reverence in the palace of the King of kings than in that of an earthly sovereign?

“Moreover, his mother made him a little coat.” The “coat,” also, as well as the ephod, was a priestly garment, sometimes called the robe of the ephod. It was worn under the ephod, as a cassock is worn under a surplice, and in short might be described as a kind of cassock without sleeves. “And brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.” There is something very beautiful here, something very full of pathos. You remember how Jacob showed his fondness for Joseph, as the son of his old age, by making him a coat of many colours.^c Hannah, who became late in her life the mother of Samuel, showed her fondness for her child in a like manner. She had given him indeed to the service of God; father and mother had (in a certain sense) forsaken him, and the Lord had taken him up^d—taken him as an inmate into His house of prayer. But she naturally wished that, when he ministered before the Lord, he should still be reminded of his mother, that, when he put on the garments of his ministry, thoughts of her and her affection for him might blend with his sacred duties. So she contrived that, while worshipping his Father in heaven, he should have a memorial of his mother upon earth. And thus the thought of home, and the love of it, was kept alive upon his heart.

Oh let all young people cherish that thought and love of home, as one great means, under God’s grace and blessing, of keeping the heart pure. Be

^c See Gen. xxxvii. 3.

^d See Psalm xxvii. 10.

not ashamed of loving your mother, much less of her loving you. It is God's will and Christ's will that this love should be maintained in all its vigour. God hath said, "Honour thy father and thy mother,"^e and, in order to give additional importance to this precept, has made it the first commandment with promise.^f Be sure then, when parted from home, to let your thoughts and heart go back thither. Do what you can to please your parents at a distance; write to them often; let it be your constant study that they shall have good reports of you. And see that you mix up the thought of them with your religious duties; earnestly pray for God's blessing upon them; and let your mother's love, of which you have had such good proof, remind you of that of God and Christ, which is tenderer, stronger, purer, even than a mother's love. Thus, when father and mother forsake you by death, will the Lord take you up,^g and carry you in His bosom^h to the end of life's journey.

[NOTES.—v. 19. *a little coat*.—The same Hebrew word here translated "coat" is used in Exodus xxviii. 31 to describe the robe of the ephod, ornamented at the skirt with bells and pomegranates, which was an important part of the dress of the high priest. A different word is used to describe the coat made by Jacob for Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 3). This seems to have been a *sleeved tunic*, fringed, and reaching down to the feet. Some commentators suppose however that Jacob, by giving it to Joseph, meant to make him elder son, and thus priest of the family, instead of Reuben (see 1 Chron. v. 1).—It is possible that Hannah may have meant to show, by the coat she made for Samuel, that the child was her first-born, and that she had a special pride and pleasure in him.

^e Exodus xx. 12, and S. Matt. xv. 4.

^g See Psalm xxvii. 10.

^f See Eph. vi. 2.

^h See Isaiah xl. 11.

P. 107, l. 2. Many of those who have begun by being choristers, have in later life become eminent clergymen.

The great Erasmus, a native of Rotterdam (1467-1536), was a chorister, when quite a young child, in the Cathedral of Utrecht. Coming to England in 1498, he formed a strong attachment to our country, and became intimate with Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, whom he assisted in the establishment of St. Paul's School, which was dedicated to "the Child Jesus." When he came to England (by the invitation of Henry VIII.) in 1510, he was made Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and Archbisop Warham gave him the living of Aldington, in Kent, which, however, he soon resigned, as "he could not feign to feed a flock whose tongue he knew not."

Soon after he settled at Basle, and there put forth (in 1516) the first printed edition of the Greek Testament which the world had ever seen. His notes on the Testament were held in such esteem, that in 1547 (eleven years after his death) it was ordered by Act of Parliament that a copy of them, translated into English, should be placed upon a desk in every parish church in England, so that all who could read in the parish might have the benefit of his explanations. He was not only one of the most learned men of his time, but probably gave a greater impulse to the revival of learning than any one else. In his last illness he wrote a Commentary on the Fifteenth Psalm ("Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle," etc.) He died at Basle in 1536, with the words "Dear God" upon his lips.

Bishop Thomas Cooper, who was appointed by Queen Elizabeth to the see of Lincoln and Winchester in succession, had been a chorister of Magdalen College, Oxford. When he revisited Magdalen as its visitor, he succeeded in restoring to the choristers their surplices, which had been removed by a Puritanical President. This was in 1585. He was the author of several works, one of which was called "An Admonition to the People of England." In it he defended the Bishops against the attacks made upon them in a pamphlet published under the feigned name of Martin Mar-prelate. He was buried in Winchester Cathedral in 1594.

Bishop Robert Frampton had been a chorister of C.C.C., Oxford, and afterwards a student of Christ Church. He became Dean of Gloucester in 1673, and Bishop of Gloucester in 1680. He was one of the nine non-juring bishops, who would not renounce their allegiance to James II. in

favour of the Prince of Orange, and was therefore deprived of his bishopric in 1690.

Biographical notices of these and other eminent men who have been choristers in their boyhood, will be found in a most valuable little manual, of which every chorister should be possessed, entitled "A Manual of Devotion for Choristers and Schoolboys," published in 1848 by Masters, 78 New Bond Street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOD'S REPAYMENT OF LOANS.

I SAM. II. 20, 21.

20. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home.

21. And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters.

GOD is a good paymaster. No man was ever the poorer for lending to Him. He not only repays, but repays with large interest. Hannah had given up to the Lord, for the service of His house of prayer, that which she prized very fondly, which she could not but very fondly prize. She had given up a child, the child of many prayers and tears,—the child for which she had longed and yearned, and which she had besought God to give her,—the child which, at the time she parted with him, was her only one. When she first came back from the tabernacle, after leaving him there, her life must have seemed comparatively objectless and pointless. She had no more of those little offices to perform for her child, which are at once a mother's duty and delight. She could no longer make him

kneel at her knees, before she placed him in his bed, and worship, in words which she put into his mouth, Jehovah the God of his fathers. She could no longer stroke and smooth his growing hair (that hair, which, in token of his dedication to the Lord, was never to be cut),^a and, laying her hand upon his head, give him her blessing before he slept, and invoke upon him the guardianship of God and His holy angels. And we must remember that in those early times, and in a country very imperfectly civilized, as Palestine always has been, a country where the traveller is exposed to "perils of waters and perils of robbers," it would not be very easy for her to receive news of her child. Once and again, perhaps, in the course of the year Eli might find one of the worshippers at Shiloh, who was making his way to mount Ephraim, and might entrust him with a message for Hannah and her husband; but these occasions would be few and far between. No; for the greater part of the year she must console herself with making the little coat, and looking forward to the next pilgrimage of her husband to Shiloh, and counting the days till it arrived. But she was to be amply repaid—repaid over and over again, and indeed in more forms than one, for the sacrifice that she had made of her child. When her faith and patience had been duly proved, little Samuel was to be replaced by five children, "three sons and two daughters." All the fondness and tenderness of a mother's heart, which it requires suitable objects to draw forth, was to blossom again in her heart, at a period when life must have been dropping with her into the sere and yellow leaf. And it is intimated to her in

^a See Num. vi. 5, and 1 Sam. i. 11.

Eli's blessing that those new domestic joys were to be God's acknowledgment of the loan which she, and her husband with her, had lent unto the Lord. "The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord." We must remember that these words were spoken by the high priest, and that the holder of the office of high priest was often endowed by God, though he himself might be but an indifferent or even a bad character, with the gift of prophecy. Thus we read that Caiaphas, although a wicked man, and bent on our Lord's destruction, had his words overruled to prophesy of Christ's atonement and its effects.^b Eli was a culpably weak, although personally a pious, old man. He had not God's honour at heart, as he should have had; for he would not use the power entrusted to him to put down profaneness and vice in the courts of the Lord's house. Still he *was* high priest, and, as holding that highest office in the Church of God, he was enabled to prophesy. His blessing, then, was no ordinary marriage blessing; it was prophetic; it foretold what it asked for; and I have no doubt Elkanah and his wife felt that it did so. They felt, when they reached their home after receiving it, that it was now a home blessed with the promise of new "olive plants round about the table."^c Two or three years ago they had gone to God's house, to make an offering to Him of what most they prized. They had come back once and again, and missed their treasure. But now that they had patiently endured, they were to receive the blessing. They came back home this time, most unlike Naomi, not empty, but full—full, if not yet in possession, at all events in the anticipations of faith.

^b See S. John xi. 49-53.

^c See Psalm cxxviii. 3.

What a sound of rest and tranquillity there is in the words, "They went unto their own home," thus understood. Let us ask ourselves whether we know what it is to return from the house of God, in the comfortable assurance that what we have there asked faithfully we shall receive effectually, and solaced by a sense of His presence and blessing? That blessing is given us through the mouth of ministers, weak, sinful, and ignorant as we ourselves are, yet, in virtue of their high office, empowered to bless God's people in His name. And how soothingly the great blessing of all—the Communion Blessing—begins; "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." He who receives it in faith, after sending forth his prayer, is like Noah receiving back into his ark, in the evening, with the olive branch of peace in her mouth, the dove which in the morning he had sent forth to seek her fortunes upon the watery waste.^d

But the abundant requital of the loan lent by Hannah to the Lord reminds me that there is a sense, in which we too may lend to the Lord and be requited. Time given to God's cause or God's service, labour given to it, money given to it,—it shall all come back again fourfold into our bosom. St. Peter, when he was busy washing his nets, broke off his occupations, and lent the Lord his boat as a pulpit to preach from.^e And St. Peter, though he and his partners had toiled all the night in fishing, and had taken nothing, was rewarded by a draught of fishes weighty enough to break his net.^f And the wise man says;

^d See Gen. viii. 11.

^e See S. Luke v. 2,

^f See S. Luke v. 5, 6.

“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord: and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.”^g Does any one say that his own experience has never yet borne out the truth of this proverb—that he has never found himself the richer for giving to God? Perhaps it is, brother, because you have hitherto given what it cost you nothing to part with, what you could spare and never miss. You have been like the rich men at the treasury chest, who cast in to the offerings of God of their abundance; not like the poor widow, who of her penury “cast in all that she had, even all her living.”^h Remember that Hannah gave a child, an only child, something in which her heart’s best affections were bound up, something which she *did* miss every hour of her waking existence. Go and do thou likewise; and thus make trial of God’s large-heartedness in paying His debts.

But never wilt thou do so, until thou hast first learned with thy heart the precious doctrine that God requires us not to do that for Him, which He has not first done for us. If He crowns with extraordinary blessing (as in Abraham’s case,ⁱ and as in Hannah’s) the sacrifice of a son, He has not been slow Himself to make that sacrifice for each one of us. He not only gives created good, which (because He is the Creator, and has all resources at His command) cost Him nothing, but He gives a part of Himself, His only begotten Son, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father. He gave Christ *for* us, to represent us in His life of righteousness and in His death of agony. He

^g Offertory sentence from Prov. xix. ^h S. Mark xii. 41-end.

ⁱ See Gen. xxii. 15-19.

gives Christ *to* us, to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption.[†] And this out of love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[‡] Open your heart to receive this unspeakable gift. And then there is no sacrifice, even of things most fondly cherished, which thou wilt be indisposed to make for God.

[†] See 1 Cor. i. 30.

[‡] S. John iii. 16.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW A BOY MAY BE KEPT PURE.

I SAM. II. 21 to end of 26.

21. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord.

22. Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

23. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

24. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress.

25. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them.

26. And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.

HOW wonderfully God's Scripture proves itself to be His, by having a word for all the affairs and troubles of men, and for all circumstances in which they can possibly be placed! A Christian father, knowing by experience what school is, might well hesitate to send his sons there. They will be sure, he might think, to learn every manner of evil there; and there is no very long step from learning evil to practising it.

What anxiety under these circumstances must the placing them at school cause him ; and yet the boys must be educated somehow, and his own work or profession leaves him no leisure to educate them himself. Now as this was to be a very real and a very common trial, and as the more right-minded a man is, the more keenly he will feel it, one great example must be given in God's Word in which a young boy, brought up amid the worst possible influences, and in daily contact with the worst possible characters, retained by God's grace his simplicity and purity of mind, resisted all evil, and grew up to be an eminent saint and servant of God. Like all the cases selected for us as examples, it was a very strong case, the strongest that can be imagined. No boy at an ordinary school is subjected to such a trial of principle as was Samuel. For though his associates may be very bad boys, yet at all events they are not ministers of religion. And though what he sees and gets to know there is as bad as bad can be, yet at all events he does not see the services of the Church profaned, and people scandalized and disgusted whenever they go to church, and the congregation driven away and deterred from worshipping by the gross misconduct of the clergy. This would be worse than the very worst things that are seen and learned at ordinary schools ; for in such a case the very persons set over him, those to whom he is bound to look up, and from whom he is pretty certain to take his tone, would be doing all they could to lead him astray. And yet little Samuel, by God's preserving grace, escaped all the evil, in the very thick of which he was reared. And not escaped it merely (as one may imagine

that many a boy brought up at our schools *does* escape) like a brand plucked out of the burning (which, though rescued, is a good deal the worse for having been *in* the burning), with the marks and scars of sin upon his heart and conscience, and with all the freshness and bloom of youthful piety worn off, but as unharmed by the burning as St. John was by the caldron of boiling oil, or the three holy children by Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, upon whom the smell of fire had not passed, "nor was an hair of their head singed."^a Samuel, in short, was saintly as a boy no less than as a man. And see how this is indicated to us in the narrative. It was not that Samuel made a profession, of being religious, or talked much about it; it was not even that he did anything remarkable, or out of the way of those ordinary duties and tasks which Eli set him; we are merely told, and told three times over, twice before he was called to be a prophet, and once after, that he "grew."^b So of St. John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ, as Samuel prepared the way for David, we are told that "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit."^c Both children needed to grow and wax strong in spirit, inasmuch as both were to be national reformers coping with the abounding errors and evils of their time; but how different the scenes of their education! John the Baptist's in the wilderness, among the jungles and the palms that lined the Jordan; Samuel's at the tabernacle, in the midst of the most depraved and profane priesthood, which the world probably has ever seen. Yet Samuel being there by God's Provi-

^a Dan. iii. 27.

^b See 1 Sam. ii. 21, 26, and iii. 19.

^c S. Luke i. 80.

dence and call, and being preserved momentarily by His grace, grew as much in grace and knowledge as John the Baptist among the mountain fastnesses and the grand solitudes of nature. "The child grew"—in stature, no doubt, in the first instance (how noticeable it is, by the way, that of all the three Nazarites who were dedicated to God before their birth, and from their birth, Samson,^d Samuel, and John the Baptist, it is said that the child grew), but also in grace and knowledge, and in all those qualifications which give a man moral and spiritual power. The secret of this growth is told us on the first occasion of its being mentioned,—“the child Samuel grew *before the Lord.*” It was not only that he grew up to manhood in the courts of the tabernacle, where God was worshipped, and thus under the shelter of God’s roof and under God’s own eye; but that the child knew and felt he was in God’s presence, and acted accordingly. He knew what it was to say in his own mind, with Hagar, “Thou God seest me.”^e Children may be often brought to church, and reared amid the services of the house of God, but there is no “growing before the Lord,” no possibility of making any advance in goodness, unless they feel that while in church they are in God’s house, and must conduct themselves, even when service is not going on, with great thoughtfulness and reverence. And, if they are to be indeed holy children, they must strive to remember that even when out of church they are still under God’s eye, and to let that thought restrain them when they are tempted to sin, and urge them to please Him by their conduct.

But in the next notice of Samuel’s growth

^d Judges xiii. 24.

^e Gen. xvi. 13.

(observe, pray, that these two notices occur, the one at the beginning, the other at the end, of the paragraph which records the cruel temptations to which he was exposed, and the pestilent moral atmosphere in which he was brought up) it is still more clearly indicated that his growth was not in stature only, but in wisdom and goodness. "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men." What an honour is it to Samuel that the Evangelist St. Luke could find no words better fitted than these in which to describe the growth of the humanity of our blessed Lord, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."^f This is a sort of testimony to the sanctity of Samuel's childhood, which no other childhood of mere man ever received. And this surely is an indication that we should study Samuel's childhood, and endeavour to profit by the many lessons of it. He grew "in favour with the Lord." Now we are told that "God is light,"^g and that "God is love."^h And therefore nobody can grow in favour with God without growing in light and growing in love; that is, as St. Peter in his second Epistle phrases it, growing "in grace" (*i.e.* in love) "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"ⁱ (*i.e.* in light). Samuel studied the law of Moses, with prayer, under the tuition of Eli, and thus grew in wisdom. He observed to do all that was taught in the law of Moses, and thus grew in grace.—But it is added that he was "in favour also with men." How? With Eli, no doubt. But with Hophni and Phinehas also? Well, even

^f S. Luke ii. 52.^h 1 John iv. 8, 16.^g 1 John i. 5.ⁱ 2 Peter iii. 18.

with them probably, vile as they were. The worst men may be touched, and softened, and made a little remorseful by the holiness of a child. I daresay if Samuel had thrust himself out of his place into theirs, and had tried to preach to them as their father did, they would have turned on him, and hated him, and vented their spite upon him. But as in those early days he had no call to do that, and was only a good God-fearing conscientious little boy, obeying all their lawful commands because they were priests of the Lord, and showing the utmost reverence to their office, though he could show none to their character, they had not a word to say against him; and I do not doubt that when they saw him clasping his hands and saying his prayers, his long black uncut locks hanging down over his face, as he bowed body and soul before God, a tear or two stole out of the eyes of those hard, bad men, and trickled down their cheeks, and with a smothered sigh they wished that they themselves, as boys, had been like him.

We have spoken of Samuel's growing. Growth is the sure sign of life. It is so in nature. If a plant lives, it grows. It is so in grace. If a soul lives, it grows. Judge we then by this test whether our souls are now alive. Are we growing in light and in love, in grace and in wisdom? Are we better Christians this year—more loving, more tender, more abhorrent of sin—than we were last? Have we more of that knowledge which comes from the study of our own hearts, and from the study of God's Word? If not, what is the alternative? If the soul is not alive, it is dead, wrapped in that slumber from which only the Spirit of God can wake it—"dead in trespasses and sins."¹

¹ Eph. ii. 1.

NOTES.—v. 25. *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?*—The best way of understanding this is to supply a few words. *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him* (inflict some punishment for the offence). In this case the friends of the offender may “entreat for him;” nay, it may happen that the party who is wronged, feeling that the offender has suffered enough, may be touched with pity, and ask for some mitigation of the punishment. Thus it was in the case of Miriam’s offence against Moses. When God, the heavenly Judge, smote Miriam with leprosy for speaking against Moses, Moses prayed for his sister that she might be healed (see Num. xii. 1, 2, 9, 10, 13). In cases like these the judge is a disinterested party, and therefore, as to his personal feelings, he has no difficulty in granting the exemption. *But if a man sin against the Lord*, the Judge Himself is the person aggrieved; and therefore in this case there is no room for the friends of the offender, or for the wronged person, to *entreat for him*. A human judge would say under such circumstances—“You are not the person injured, and therefore you have no right to ask for a remission of the punishment.” Eli did not know, as we do, that even if a man has most grievously offended God, there yet is a Saviour ready to intercede for him. And this Saviour is God as well as man—a Person in the Divine Nature, and therefore *the offended and insulted party*.

Let it be observed how Eli is condemned out of his own mouth by the words which he here uses. The offences of his sons had been quite as much against man as against God, as has been pointed out in Chapter xvi. pp. 100, 101. And, by his own showing, the sins of man against man ought to be, and usually are, “judged” (or punished) by a human “judge.” Ought he not, therefore, being the judge, as well as the high priest, of Israel, to have punished his sons? But he has not the moral courage and firmness to do this; so he blinks their grievous offences against man, and taxes them only with their misconduct towards God.

His words may serve to teach us this very solemn lesson, that offences against God are much more serious and awful than those against man, the commandments of the First Table being “greater” than those of the Second (see S. Matt. xxii. 35-40). Whereas people often think that, if they have done no harm to anybody, and have been fairly

good husbands, fathers, masters, neighbours, it matters but little that they have neglected God, seldom attending His house of prayer, and never drawing near to His holy Table.

Ibid. *Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them.*—Hophni and Phinehas having defied and insulted God, God gave them over to that hardness and blindness of heart, which follows naturally upon a course of presumptuous high-handed sin; and therefore the remonstrances which might, with the ordinary assistances of Divine grace, have touched and reclaimed them, failed to have any effect—“they hearkened not unto the voice of their father.” Something very similar we read in Joshua xi. 20 about the Canaanite cities, who would not submit to the children of Israel, though the Lord had shown his miraculous power in their behalf. “For it was of the Lord to *harden their hearts*, that they should come against Israel in battle, *that he might destroy them utterly*, and that they might have no favour, but *that he might destroy them*, as the Lord commanded Moses.”

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT SAMUEL'S CALL RESEMBLES IN MODERN TIMES.

I SAM. III. 1, 2.

1. And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days ; there was no open vision.

2. And it came to pass at that time.

THE story of Samuel's call in childhood (Josephus tells us he was twelve years old, when this call reached him^a) is often treated as if it were applicable to the case of a young person, whose conscience is awakened to the claims of religion at a very early age. But this application is a mistake, and gives us altogether a wrong impression of the story. Samuel, as we have seen, was a good, God-fearing, conscientious boy; he was under the daily guidance of Divine grace, long before his call. How long before it is difficult to say ; but it seems, as far as we can gather from the narrative, that from the earliest dawning of consciousness, from his first perception of the difference between right and wrong, he had been, owing possibly to the fervent prayers of his mother for him, under the influence of religion.

^a Ant. Book v. Chap. x. § 4.

We are told that, when he was first brought to the tabernacle and left there, "the child was a child"^b (that is, was humble, simple, and docile); and we are told of him also since that time that "he grew before the Lord,"^c that he "grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men."^d Now growth, as we said in our last Chapter, implies life. Where there is growth in grace, there must be the life of grace. The call of Samuel was not a call to become a *servant* of God,—*that* call Samuel had received when he was first brought to the tabernacle, and there solemnly dedicated to God's service,—but to be a *prophet* of God, and a great reformer of the Church and nation. No one now-a-days receives a call 'exactly similar, because supernatural callings and gifts are no longer vouchsafed. But even now-a-days men receive a call to become ministers of God's Word, partly through the providential ordering of their lives, partly through some passages of Holy Scripture which seem to fix themselves with power upon their consciences, partly through a secret communication of the Spirit of God with their hearts and souls; and it is to this call the Bishop alludes in the Ordination Service of Deacons, when he asks the candidates, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration?" . . . "Do you think that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the due Order of this Realm, to the Ministry of the Church?" Moreover, in bad times of the Church, and in evil days, whatever shape the evil takes, whether it shows itself in the form of profligacy and a re-

^b 1 Sam. i. 24.^c 1 Sam. ii. 21.^d 1 Sam. ii. 26.

laxation of wholesome discipline, or in widespread superstition, or in doubt and unbelief; Almighty God even now-a-days raises up men who are fitted to grapple with the evil, and to set right (with His gracious assistance) the things that are wrong. And it may quite happen that He should stir the spirit of some very young person to see what is wrong in these times, and to resolve that, if life and strength are granted him, he will, when grown to be a man, and his own master, devote himself to setting it right. This is the way in which all great changes for good have been made in the world,—they have been all brought about by one or two strong characters, suited by God's Providence to the times in which they lived, who have been vividly impressed with the sad state of things around them, and have resolved, it may be very early in life, to devote their whole time and energy to mending it. And thus it might well be that God should put into the heart of some young chorister, even while he is quite young, a desire to be one of His ministers in after life; and that He might, in after life, open a way for him to receive the necessary education which should qualify him for the office of Priesthood; and that He might make such a boy willing to avail himself of the opening, and to work hard at school and college, so as to come up to the mark,—and that this chorister might thus ultimately become not only a minister of His Word and Sacraments, but a very useful minister, turning many to righteousness, and winning many souls to the Saviour. Nay, it might very conceivably happen, if God should so will, that some young boy, brought up under the shadow of a Cathedral cloister, should turn out to be, when

grown up, the man born "to set right times out of joint,"—the man whose influence, example, and teaching should be one very main agency in reforming the disorders of the Church and society, in putting down abuses, reviving and giving effect to old institutions, and throwing back the tide of superstition and infidelity,—in a word, the same kind of man for whom the Church prays in the Psalms, when she sings; "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand: and upon the son of man, whom thou madest so strong for thine own self."^e

I say, these great things might happen, if God so pleased, in the case of any young boy. More unlikely things have happened, without any miracle or departure from the ordinary course of nature, and might happen again. But now pray observe what are the conditions of such a thing happening. Little Samuel, when the call of God reached him at the age of twelve, was found not doing anything remarkable or extraordinary, but engaged in the ordinary, commonplace duties of his station. He was ministering unto the Lord before Eli, that is, he was doing faithfully and well those little humble tasks about the tabernacle, which he was equal to, and which Eli his master set him,—fetching, and carrying, and sweeping, and lighting lamps, and setting doors open or closing them, and doubtless also, at appointed times, reciting prayers and singing hymns. And he was waiting upon Eli, too, as a sort of personal attendant, doing little offices for him by day, and sleeping near him at night, that the aged priest might always have somebody at call. It is wonderful how many cases there are

^e Psalm lxxx. 17, P. B. V.

in the Bible of persons called to be or to do something great, when they were engaged in doing the common everyday duties of their station. Gideon was threshing wheat by the winepress, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and commissioned him to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.^f Moses was feeding Jethro's flock in the desert, when the angel of the bush appeared to him, and sent him to bring forth the people out of Egypt.^g David was called from the sheepfold, where he was tending the sheep, to receive the anointing which should make him king.^h Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and himself with the twelfth, when Elijah in passing by threw his mantle upon him, and thus designated him as his successor in the prophetic office.ⁱ Nehemiah was waiting as cup-bearer on King Artaxerxes, when the conversation took place which ended in his being sent to rebuild Jerusalem, the city of his fathers' sepulchres.^j The wise men of the East were studying the heavens, which was their business, when the star of Bethlehem dawned in all its beauty on their eyes, and called them to make up their packages of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and lade their camels, and seek the infant Saviour.^k St. Peter and St. Andrew were casting a net into the sea,^l St. James and St. John were mending their nets,^m St. Matthew was busy with his ledger and his till,ⁿ when the Lord passed by and called them. What do these and several other instances of the same sort teach, but that in order to be called by God to something good and

^f Judges vi. 11, 12. ^g Exodus iii. 1, 2. ^h 1 Sam. xvi. 11, 12, 13. ⁱ 1 Kings xix. 19. ^j Neh. ii. 1, 5, 6. ^k S. Matt. ii. 1, 2, 11. ^l S. Matt. iv. 18, 19. ^m S. Matt. iv. 21. ⁿ S. Matt. ix. 9.

great, people need not travel out of the high-road of their commonplace everyday occupations, but rather should be found busied in those occupations?

“The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask.”

If then it should please God at some future time to call any young reader of this book to undertake something good or great in your after life, you see how you must be found behaving, and what you must be found doing at present. You must be docile, obedient, modest, reverent, like the child Samuel. You must be conscientiously fulfilling the little duties set you by your parents, and those in authority over you. You must be doing your school tasks with diligence, and thus qualifying yourself for usefulness in after life. If you fulfil these conditions in boyhood, we cannot say what use it may please our Lord to make of you, when you grow up to be a man. But even if He has nothing great or distinguished in store for you, it is more than honour enough, and more than recompence enough, to be the very least and lowest of His faithful servants. One of these He will surely make you, if you give yourself up to Him in early life. And for the least and lowest of His faithful servants is laid up the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him at that day.^o

^o See 2 Tim. iv. 8.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMMUNINGS OF GOD WITH MAN IN THE NIGHT.

I SAM. III. I, 2, 3, 4.

1. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

3. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;

4. That the Lord called Samuel.

SAMUEL is not the only person, nor the only youth, to whom Almighty God has made wonderful communications by night. From a passage in the Book of Job, which is put into the mouth of young Elihu, we are led to think that the night season was a common time for Divine revelations to be made to those to whom they were vouchsafed. The passage, written probably long before Samuel's call, adjusts itself wonderfully to that event; "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not" (to Samuel He spoke three several times, before he perceived who it was that was speaking). "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth

upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealet^h their instruction.”^a

In a later chapter of this Book of Samuel we find dreams mentioned as one of the means by which of old time God was wont to give an answer to those who consulted Him. “The Lord answered him not,” it is said of Saul, “neither by dreams, nor by Urim” (a mode of divination connected with the high priest’s breastplate), “nor by prophets.”^b Dreams, for the most part, take place by night. Young Joseph, at the age of seventeen, was favoured with two prophetic dreams—the dream of the sheaves doing homage to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon, and eleven stars making obeisance to him,—in which was foreshown the honour which should be paid him in Egypt by the members of his own family.^c I will not speak of the three dreams of that other Joseph, the reputed father of our blessed Lord,—dreams which played a most important part in God’s plan, inasmuch as they were the means of preserving the infant Saviour,^d and of vindicating to us the great truths that “He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,”^e nor of the important communication which God made to the Apostle Paul in the night-season,^f—because I have now in view chiefly young people who have heard God’s voice in the night. But these New Testament instances of great revelations made by night show us that, even in Gospel times, God has communicated with men in a way similar to that which He adopted under the Old Testament. Going back

^a Job xxxiii. 14, 15, 16. ^b 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. ^c See Gen. xxxvii. 5-12.
^d See S. Matt. ii. 13, 19, 20. ^e See S. Matt. i. 20.
^f Acts xvi. 9.

to it once more, we find that it was by night that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, and bade him ask what he would, and when Solomon represented that he was but a little child, too young for the administration of a great kingdom, and therefore requested that he might be qualified for his new duties by an understanding heart, endowed him with wisdom above all his predecessors and successors, and added withal riches and honour.^g And it is no doubt in reference to this dream of Solomon's, and its blessed and magnificent results in his own experience, that in Psalm cxxvii. he sings; "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so" (that is, all, and more than all, the fruits which men seek to win by industry and labour) "God giveth to his beloved" (*not* "sleep," as it is incorrectly rendered in the English Bible, but) "*in sleep.*"^h Solomon had laid him down to sleep a little child, ignorant, inexperienced, incompetent,—and had risen from sleep a wise man, possessed of all the results of study and experience, and fully qualified for the administration of his kingdom without any burning of the midnight oil, without any toiling and moiling, any rising up early or sitting up late.

Here then is young Joseph visited in the night season by prophetic dreams; young Samuel, visited at the same still hour by a call to be a prophet, at a time when the voice of Prophecy had long been comparatively silent, and God's communications with His Church were few and far between; young Solomon, finally, holding converse with God in sleep, and receiving from Him such endowments of mind as made him the wisest

^g 1 Kings iii. 5-16.

^h Psalm cxxvii. 2.

and most eminent of princes. What are we to learn from hence? Surely this, that although in these days we have no warrant to expect miracles, yet that the night is a season fitted for Divine communications to the souls of men, and that even now-a-days, without any interference with the ordinary course of nature, God may make such communications by His Spirit to the heart and conscience of any one among us. The night is, I have said, a fit season for converse with God. It is a still season. The excitements, occupations, and amusements of the day are at an end. The senses are sealed up by the darkness and the silence. If we lie awake at night, the mind is thrown back upon itself, and forced to reflect. But what are the conditions upon which we may humbly hope that God's voice will come to us, and reach our consciences and hearts, in the night? Observe, first, that Joseph, Samuel, and Solomon were all good and God-fearing youths when God favoured them with communications by night. Joseph, alone of his brethren, was virtuous and well-conducted. Samuel, we have seen, was still a child at the time of his call, not in years only, but in docility, meekness, tractability, modesty. Solomon (when the Lord appeared to him in a dream) had just given proof of his devoutness by the thousand burnt-offerings which he offered at Gibeon; and in his nightly converse with God he gives proof of his humility by calling himself a little child, and humbly asking God to supply his deficiencies.¹ Be quite sure that one condition of our hearing God's voice in the night, whether for young or old people, is that we shall not be thoughtless of Him during the

¹ See 1 Kings iii. 7, 9.

day. To the hard, the worldly-minded, the frivolous, the conceited, He cannot be expected, at the least in His ordinary course of procedure, to make communications as they lie upon their bed. And more especially, it must be a condition of such communications that our latest thoughts, before we commit ourselves to repose, shall be of Him. The Psalmist found nightly devotion to be full of blessing and comfort; "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches;"^j and probably if we were to practise nightly devotion more conscientiously, our experience would more or less agree with his. Let us first solemnize our minds by the thought that we may, for all we know, be lying down to rise no more. Let our bed, the darkness and stillness of our chamber, and the drapery of the night, remind us of the winding-sheet and the grave, and of the hush and quietude and calm of our own spirits, when our bodies are wrapped in the one and laid in the other. Let us then try to realize the presence of God and of Christ, and to recommend ourselves to His mercy, who is about our bed as well as about our path.^k Let us speak in the accents of prayer into the great darkness, as if we were speaking into His very ear. Let us commune too with our own heart in the night, and search out our spirits,^l by a faithful examination into our conduct during the past day. And let us try to turn the Holy Scripture, which is God's Word, into His living voice, by conning well-known passages of it over and over

^j Psalm lxxiii. 5, 6.

^k See Psalm cxxxix. 2, *P. B. V.*

^l See Psalm lxxvii. 6, *P. B. V.*

in our mind, as we lie upon our beds, and praying that light may be thrown upon them, and that they may be brought home to our hearts. Thus shall we use the *means* of nightly communion with God, speaking to Him from our beds, and listening to His oracles for a reply. And the means will not be used long and devoutly, without our in some measure realizing the blessing. We shall receive some instruction, or some comfort, from the remembrance of God's name in the night.^m Perhaps even a song of praise will be put into our mouth, as into that of Paul and Silas in the inner prison at Philippi;ⁿ and we shall know from our own experience the truth of that attribute, which is ascribed to God in the Book of Job; "God my maker, who giveth songs in the night."^o

^m See Psalm cxix. 55.

ⁿ See Acts xvi. 25.

^o Job xxxv. 10.

CHAPTER XXII.

WISER THAN THE AGED,—AND WHY?

I SAM. III. 2, 3, 4.

2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see ;

3. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep ;

4. That the Lord called Samuel : and he answered, Here am I.

THESSE words call our attention to a great and instructive contrast. Here on the one hand is Eli, venerable by his years (for we are told that the infirmities of age were upon him ; “ his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see ”) and still more venerable by his office ; for being high priest, he is the first personage in the Jewish Church, and the religious teacher and representative before God of the whole nation. It was through the high priest, as a general rule, that Divine oracles were given for the guidance of the people. When God was to be consulted, he was the person to lay the case before the Most High, and to receive the answer through Urim and

Thummim,^a some method of divination, of which little more can now be known than that it was connected with the high priest's ephod and breast-plate. But here lies Eli in his bed, blind and deaf, having lost his power of insight, not into outward things alone, but into Divine visions, and deaf to the voice of God, because indeed the voice of God passes him by, and does not deign to notice him. And yet Divine visions are vouchsafed, and Divine voices are heard, in his immediate neighbourhood. And to whom does the vision and the voice come? To a boy of twelve, who is acting as Eli's assistant and attendant, and who is contrasted with him in almost every particular. First, this boy is in life's morning, and in the fresh dawn of his faculties, just as on the other hand Eli's life has dropped into the sere and yellow leaf, and his faculties are beginning to fail. Then, again, this boy holds the very lowest place in the Church of God, as Eli held the very highest. "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God" (in the margin it is, "I would choose rather to sit at the threshold of the house of my God");—these are the words which the Psalmist uses when he wishes to denote the lowest and most menial of all the offices connected with the temple.^b And Samuel held this lowest and most menial office. He was a doorkeeper,—a young Korahite.^c In the morning after his call we find him opening the doors of the house of the Lord.^d And doubtless Eli made use of him in all kinds of ways in

^a See Exod. xxviii. 30, Numbers xxvii. 21, Judges xx. 18, 23, 1 Sam. xxiii. 9-13, 1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 1 Sam. xxx. 7, 8, and Cruden's Concordance, *Art.* Thummim. ^b Ps. lxxxiv. 10. ^c See 1 Chron. vi. 33, 37, and the title of Ps. lxxxiv. ^d See 1 Sam. iii. 15.

which a boy so young could be made use of—in sweeping, in fetching, in carrying messages, as well as in those higher sacred functions which grown-up Levites had to perform. Yet over the couch of this little menial in the sanctuary an awful form, charged with a solemn message, stands (for it is said that “the Lord came, and *stood*, and called^e”), and on his ear a voice breaks which syllables his name, and in doing so reminds him that his whole character and history, from the day of his birth, have come under the Lord’s immediate notice. Prophecy, which has been silent since the days of Moses, is about to open her voice again among the chosen people. But she does not take the venerable high priest for her organ, but the little Levite boy, his attendant.

The contrast irresistibly reminds us of those verses of Psalm cxix., “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.”^f Samuel hearing God’s call in the night season, and replying to it with docility, while the aged high priest is passed over, is an instance of the truth of these words,—one of the many fulfillments they have received in the course of human experience.

But let us clearly understand the words, so as to draw no mistaken inference from them as to the duty of young people towards their elders. What the Psalmist says amounts to no more than this, that he has more understanding than such teachers as do *not* make God’s testimonies their meditation,—that he understands more than those

^e 1 Sam. iii. 10.

^f Ps. cxix. 99, 100.

aged persons who do *not* keep God's precepts. Of course it is quite possible that a teacher may meditate on God's testimonies as often and as devoutly as any one of his pupils, and that a man advanced in years may practise God's precepts as faithfully and conscientiously as a child; and in this case the teacher will have greatly the advantage of the pupil, and the old man of the child, because it is through our own personal experience that God teaches us so many precious spiritual lessons, which could not be taught in any other way, and the teacher and the old man have had an experience so much longer, broader, and more varied than a child can possibly have had. And therefore the first impressions of young Elihu, when moved to speak in a company of people older than himself, were perfectly just and natural; "I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom."^g But he goes on to explain that true wisdom comes from the inspiration of God,—from His communication with the human spirit, which Elihu believes himself to have received, and that therefore a younger person, so moved, may address his elders without any impropriety.^h It was a case of inspired youth against uninspired age, and in that case youth would have the advantage. Samuel, though a child, had made God's testimonies, so far as he knew them, his meditation; and having done so, he had "more understanding" than at all events two grown-up men who stood to him in the position of "teachers," Hophni and Phinehas, whose "lips," since they were priests, should have kept "knowledge," and the people should have sought "the law at" their "mouth;"ⁱ but

^g Job xxxii. 6, 7.^h See Job xxxii. 8, 9.ⁱ Malachi ii. 7.

their lips were full of insolent^j and seductive^k words, and so far from teaching people the law, they compelled them to break it.^l Samuel too had kept God's precepts,—had been a good, conscientious, God-fearing little boy all his days, retaining upon his heart, by prayer and thoughtfulness, his early religious impressions, and also his love and veneration for his mother; and therefore God gave him to “understand more” than the aged Eli, who had grievously failed to keep God's precepts, for had he not honoured his sons above God,^m and neglected to punish them for their atrocious wickedness?ⁿ He had neglected a father's duty towards his offspring by nature; how meet, and right, and suitable that he should be reprov'd out of the mouth of a spiritual son!

And yet young Samuel would not have been justified in reproving Eli, had he not received a direct communication from God Himself on the subject of Eli's sin and punishment. Even with this Divine and supernatural call, even after having words put into his mouth by the Lord Himself, the boy is still backward and slow to speak, as was most natural, just, and fitting.^o Eli's conscience surmising evil to himself in the message, he insists upon knowing every jot and tittle of it, but not until he adjures Samuel to be frank on the subject will the child open his lips.^p Eli sat in Moses' seat, as the Scribes and Pharisees afterwards did.^q And because he held that position he was entitled, as a true instinct told Samuel, to be revered and obeyed in all things lawful, however much he had failed in his duty both to-

^j See 1 Sam. ii. 15, 16, 17.

^k 1 Sam. ii. 22, 23, 24.

^l See

1 Sam. ii. 24.

^m See 1 Sam. ii. 29.

ⁿ See 1 Sam. iii. 13.

^o See 1 Sam. iii. 15.

^p See 1 Sam. iii. 16-19.

^q S. Matt.

xxiii. 2, 3.

wards God and man. God has prescribed such reverence in His law, where He says, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord."^r And our best natural instincts echo this precept. But God may, if He pleases, give us an order which jars upon our natural instincts, just as in Abraham's case He bade him slay his son. He is Lord of life and death, and having given Isaac to Abraham, had a perfect right to take him away, and, if it so pleased Him, by his father's hand. Yet nothing short of God's express command would have made Abraham's action anything but the foulest and most revolting murder.

But when speaking of Samuel's divinely prompted admonition to Eli, how irresistibly are we reminded of a greater than Samuel in His dealings with the doctors and elders of the Jews! If we would appreciate the full force of the lesson taught us by the conduct of the Holy Child, we must bear in mind that, not only in His human mind did He make God's testimonies His meditation, and with His human will keep God's precepts without flaw or failure, thus gaining more understanding than His teachers, and becoming wiser than the aged, but that He was the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Eternal Wisdom, who assisted at the creation of the world;^s the "true light which," whether by reason or by revelation, or both, "lighteth every man that cometh into the world."^t How blind in comparison of Him were those old doctors, amongst whom He sat in the Temple as a boy of twelve^u ("blind guides"^v He afterwards, when grown up, had

^r Lev. xix. 32. ^s See Prov. viii. 22-32. ^t S. John i. 9.

^u See S. Luke ii. 46, 42. ^v See S. Matt. xxiii. 24.

reason to term some of them). How dim were their eyes to the revelations made to their ancestors “in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning”^w Him; how deaf were their ears to the voice of God, when it called them to acknowledge Him as the Lord’s Christ; how dead to all feeling of their own needs, to all sympathy with the rest of mankind, were their hearts! And He, the branch which had grown up in the midst of them out of the roots of Jesse, how had the sevenfold Spirit of God, by whom He had been conceived in the Virgin’s womb, made “him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord!”^x How marvellously keen His insight into the meaning of Scripture! How open His ear to the whispers of His Father’s voice!^y How impressible must have been His heart, seeing He was the only human child in whose nature there was no sin! Yet, notwithstanding all His superiority in respect not only of His sinlessness, but also of His Divine Personality, He condescends to learn from the authorized teachers of His nation, to hear them and to ask them questions,^z because they sate “in Moses’ seat,” and because the time for exercising His ministry had not yet arrived. When it has arrived, then He is no longer the antitype of little Samuel sitting at Eli’s feet to hear him recite the law, and question him about its meaning; but of Samuel, visited by the Lord, and charged to denounce judgment upon Eli. How thick and fast the woes fall upon the Scribes and Pharisees from His mouth, before He leaves the Temple for ever;^a (thicker and faster far than on Eli, because Eli, though grievously failing in his duty, was in the

^w S. Luke xxiv. 44.^x Isaiah xi. 1, 2, 3.^y See Isaiah l. 4.^z See S. Luke ii. 46.^a See S. Matt. xxiii. 1-37, and xxiv. 1.

main a true servant of God); verily, the things threatened, and the censures pronounced, are such as to make “both the ears of every one that heareth them tingle;”^b and yet, because He is Love, and must exhibit the chief characteristic of His nature, even when charged with the heaviest tidings, the frightful series of anathemas bursts at last into that pathetic plaint, like a bright rainbow forming itself upon a heavy thundercloud: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”^c

If Samuel and other messengers of God remind us ever and anon of Christ, yet how vast is the difference between them and Him, both in the self-asserting authority, and in the beautiful heart of love, which His words everywhere reveal!

^b See particularly S. Matt. xxiii. 14, 15, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33.

^c S. Matt. xxiii. 37.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN THE LAMP BURNS LOW, THE DAWN IS AT HAND.

I SAM. III. 3, 4.

3. Ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord . . .

4. . . . the Lord called Samuel.

IN order to draw the right lesson from these words, we must know something about the furniture of the holy place, and the meaning which it had. The tabernacle (and afterwards the temple) was divided into three parts; the outer court, in which the worshippers stood; the holy place, into which only the priests might enter; and the most holy place (or holy of holies), into which only the high priest was allowed to go, and that only once a year. The outer court, where the altar of burnt-offering was, signified the world, into which Christ came at His incarnation, and in the midst of which He ran His course, obeying God's law perfectly, and suffering its full penalty under the eyes of men, thus giving "himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."^a The holy place signified the Church of God, in which His Ordinances are administered to men; while the

^a Eph. v. 2.

holy of holies signified heaven, into which our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, is gone to make intercession for us, and to present unto God on our behalf the sacrifice which while on earth He made.^b

Now in the holy place there were three pieces of furniture, each of which had a very beautiful and instructive meaning. There was the altar of incense, standing in the middle, just before the veil which screened off the Holy of Holies from the holy place.^c There was the shewbread table,^d with its twelve loaves lying upon it,^e which stood on the north side of the apartment. And opposite to it was the seven-branched candlestick,^f which, including the pedestal, was five feet high, and which is here called "the lamp of God." Each of these three pieces of furniture had a separate meaning. Incense is an emblem of prayer; because, as incense when kindled sends its smoke upwards, so true prayer always mounts to God's ear; and because, as incense is fragrant, so true prayer is always acceptable to God; and again because, as incense needs fire to kindle it, so true prayer cannot be kindled upon the heart's altar, except by the power of God's Spirit, who at Pentecost came down in the shape of tongues of fire.^g The Psalmist finds in prayer a resemblance to incense, when he prays, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."^h The incense altar, then, was a figure of those prayers which are ever ascending to God from His true Church. And as once in every year Aaron was directed to

^b See Heb. iv. 14; vi. 20; and ix. 24.

^c Exodus xxx. 1, 6.

^d Exodus xxv. 23. ^e Lev. xxiv. 5, 6.

^f Exodus xxv. 31, 32, 37.

^g Acts ii. 1, 3.

^h Psalm cxli. 2.

make an atonement upon the horns of this altar with the blood of the sin-offering of atonements,ⁱ this is to teach us the important lesson that our very prayers have much in them that needs to be atoned for and forgiven; and that we should be careful to add to them the name of the Mediator, to put them in our Lord's hands, and ask Him to offer them for us, sprinkling them first with the blood of His atonement.—As to the shewbread, its meaning is a little more difficult. The Hebrew words translated shewbread mean literally "bread of the faces," or "bread of the Presence," that is, doubtless, bread of *God's* Presence. But why was the shewbread called so? Not merely, nor chiefly, because it was set out in God's Presence, that is, in His sanctuary—because in that case the altar and candlestick might have been equally well called the altar and the candlestick of the Presence,—but for a deeper reason. In the sixty-third Chapter of Isaiah mention is made of "the angel of God's presence,"^j by whom no doubt is meant our Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person in the Blessed Trinity, before His incarnation. He is God's Representative and Image, the great manifestation of the Father's face to the creatures of His hand. This bread of the Presence, then (or bread which represents the face of God), was no doubt a figure of our Lord, the true "bread of life."^k And inasmuch as the chief means whereby God feeds His people with the bread of life, is the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, the shewbread table and its loaves may well be taken to signify secondarily this Sacrament, which is the highest mean of grace possessed by the

ⁱ Exodus xxx. 10.; Lev. xvi. 18.

^j Isa. lxiii.

^k S. John vi. 32, 35, 48.

Church. And thus in the holy place of the Jewish tabernacle there was an emblem both of the prayers and the Sacraments of the Church. —And what other ordinance has the Church, besides Prayer and Sacraments? An ordinance which men have sometimes made too much of, and spoken about as if it were the one only ordinance of the Gospel, and which at other times, with a strange perverseness, they have undervalued and tried to thrust into a corner. When our Lord sent forth the Twelve from the mountain of the Ascension, He bade them not only to baptize, but to teach and preach.¹ It was by their preaching that He “caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world.”^m The candlestick, then, represents the Word of God, whether proclaimed by prophets under the old dispensation, or by apostles and succeeding ministers of the Gospel under the new. And the light given by the candlestick represents that light of the knowledge of God, which it pleases Him to diffuse throughout His Church by means of prophesying or preaching.

And now we are able to see a meaning, which we could not see before, in the circumstance of Samuel’s being called “before the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord.” In their literal sense, the words signify that it was just before morning, when the voice of God broke upon Samuel’s ear. The lamps were furnished with such a supply of oil every morning, as would keep them burning from the time they were lit until daylight made them no longer necessary. They were still burning when Samuel received the call, therefore it was not yet quite morning; it was

¹ S. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

^m Collect for S. Paul’s Day.

that darkest and dreariest hour which precedes the dawn, and when the candle burns very low in its socket. But this is mentioned as something more than a note of time : it signifies also the condition of things in the Church of God at that particular period. We read in the first verse that "the word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no open vision." It was precious ; that is, though it had not altogether ceased, it was very rarely and scantily put into men's mouths. And "there was no open vision,"—prophetic visions were occasionally vouchsafed, but not published or made generally known to the people. Since the song of Deborah no prophecy is recorded except the song of Hannah, and the prophecy of the man of God who came to Eli ; and the song of Deborah was uttered one hundred and thirty years before the call of Samuel. God for the sins of the people had discontinued His communications with them, just as, when Saul afterwards was given over to a reprobate mind, God turned His back upon him, and he had to complain, "God has departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams."ⁿ In fact, the lamp of prophecy burned very low in its socket, and was well-nigh expiring. The vileness of Eli's sons was so great, that God would not hold any intercourse with His people. But when the night was darkest, the dawn was at hand. Matters were about to mend. Samuel was to be not only a great prophet, but the first of a succession of prophets, and the founder of the schools of the prophets,—that is, of theological colleges where young men were trained for the prophetic office, and qualified

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

to give instruction in the Word of God, so far as it was at that time revealed.

The great lesson is, that we must not despair of the Church of God even in its darkest and worst times. It seems an almost hopeless case, when the clergy are profligate and profane, and teach serious error. But God has still, it may be, a great many more devout and orthodox Christians left in His Church than we think. While Hophni and Phinehas are on the stage, little Samuel is being reared behind the scenes, and in him a new dawn of prophecy is about to break. Nor yet should we despair of single persons, in whom, though they have strayed far from God's fold, there are yet traces of a better mind. The lamp of God is not yet gone out, the conscience not yet altogether seared, nor the heart altogether hardened. There may be a dawn of mercy and grace in store for them still, to be hastened on by the prayers of those who love them, and who hope against hope, and labour against discouragement for the conversion of the sinner from the error of his way.^o

[NOTE.—p. 150, l. 14. *Since the song of Deborah no prophecy is recorded except, etc.*—Deborah is called “a prophetess” in Judges iv. 4. “Therefore Deborah's song, which is quoted by the Holy Spirit, and is inserted in the next chapter, may be presumed to be an utterance of Him who spake by the prophets, and to be divinely inspired. That she had special gifts of prophecy appears from Judges iv. 7, 9, where she foretells Sisera's fate.”—(Bishop Wordsworth's Notes on the Book of Judges.) Deborah does not *foretell* anything in her song; but the word “prophecy” in the Bible means merely the speaking God's Word by His inspiration, *even where nothing is foretold.*]

^o See James v. 20.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW GOD'S WORD MAY BE TURNED INTO GOD'S VOICE.

I SAM. III. 5, 6, 7.

5. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

6. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose, and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

7. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.

HOW can it be said that "Samuel did not yet know the Lord"? Had not his mother, who was a prophetess, had not Eli, taught him about God, and put words of prayer into his mouth? Again, how can it be said that "the word of the Lord was" not "yet revealed unto him"? We rightly call the Holy Scriptures God's word. Was Samuel altogether unacquainted with the Holy Scriptures? His Bible indeed was a very small volume compared with ours, nor had he that ready means of access to the Bible, which the printing-press gives to a Christian child. Still the five Books of Moses, and probably also the Book of Joshua, existed in Samuel's day; and

certainly Eli the high priest must have had copies of them. He must have known their contents himself, and must have made them known to Samuel.

The answer to these questions is as follows:—Samuel certainly knew about God long before his call. Nay, he must have known the Lord in a spiritual sense, for he must many and many a time have held communion with Him in prayer. But he did not know Him by a special revelation made to himself. The word “know” is used in the same sense by St. John the Baptist, where he says of Christ, “*I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*”^a St. John must have known our Lord well from his earliest childhood, Elisabeth, his mother, being the cousin of the blessed Virgin. But he did not know Him by special revelation, until God gave him the token which He had led him to expect, sending down the Spirit in the form of a dove upon our Lord, when He presented Himself to be baptized.—And again, Samuel must certainly have known that part of Holy Scripture which existed before his time; he could probably repeat the Ten Commandments by heart, and was familiar with the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, and with the rules of the ceremonial law; but he had never hitherto heard the word of the Lord striking upon the outward ear by an audible voice. It is a very different thing to be addressed by name in the silent watches of the night, from merely having access to God’s written word, which

^a S. John i. 31.

is addressed to others besides one's-self. In the former way, "the word of the Lord" had not "yet been revealed" to Samuel.

Now, what has been said suggests to us the case of those persons now-a-days, who have the Bible in their hands indeed, and know its contents, but whose consciences and hearts have never been awakened by the Holy Spirit to feel that it applies to themselves personally. It is true, indeed, as I have said before, that this is a different case from Samuel's, whose call was to be a *prophet*, and who had been a good God-fearing boy long before his call, probably from the earliest period he could remember. I only say that Samuel's call *suggests to us* a certain case which often happens now-a-days, not that it exactly resembles such cases. There are many persons, then, who have the Holy Scriptures lying on their shelves, and have the opportunity of consulting them when they will, and who do from time to time read them, and yet to whom the Spirit of God has never brought them home as meant for themselves individually, and spoken to themselves. They know and believe that Christ died to save all men, and that He will come to judge all men, and that God has uttered many gracious and precious promises, and also many terrible threats and warnings, but they have never yet felt themselves personally interested in any of these things. It does not seem to them that Christ died to save them in particular, or will judge them separately by themselves, or that this or that promise, this or that threatening, ought to be taken to themselves, and has a particular reference to their case. Yet *ought they not* to feel that they are addressed individually in the Holy Scriptures, if

they believe (as Christians profess to believe) that those Scriptures are given by inspiration of God?^b For what do we mean, when we speak of a book's being given by inspiration of God? Is it not that the Holy Spirit put it into the mind of the writer of the book to write it, and directed him what to say? Now, the Holy Spirit is a Person in the Godhead, and, being God, He must, at the time when He inspired the holy men to write (and indeed at all other times), have known everything which was to happen in the future. He must have foreseen that such and such a person would live long centuries afterwards, that he would hold such and such a position, meet with such and such trials, encounter such and such difficulties, be exposed to such and such temptations. And surely, therefore, foreseeing all this, he must have had an eye to this position, these trials, these difficulties, these temptations, and must have put into the mouth and pen of the writers of Scripture such advice as would exactly meet the case, and was intended to meet it. So that it is no foolish fancy, no vain presumption, to imagine that God's book, because it is God's, has special messages for each one of us—messages as much intended for each one as the voice of God, issuing in the silence of the night from the holy of holies, was intended for Samuel's ear. The first step towards hearing the voice of God personally addressing ourselves in the pages of Scripture, is to consider deeply this characteristic of Scripture, as having been inspired by One who is perfectly acquainted with our character, circumstances, and wants. The next and more important step is, to lift up our hearts before we

^b 2 Tim. iii. 16.

read it, asking God to give us that Spirit under whose influence it was written. What we need is to have the word of God turned into His voice to us. There is great difference between a word and a voice. A voice is a spoken word—a word living, because it is spoken; it has accent, it has emphasis, it has pathos, it has solemnity, it has a tone, all of which it lacks if it is merely written. Now it is only the Holy Spirit who can turn God's word into His voice,—can give it tone, and emphasis, and solemnity,—make us feel that God, a living counsellor and guide and friend, speaks the word, and speaks it to us. And the condition of our having the Holy Spirit is, that we shall ask for Him. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”^c Read under the influence of His Spirit, Holy Scripture will seem as much addressed to ourselves as if our name were written down in it. The Lord called Samuel *by name*, a touching token to the youth that God was mindful of his whole history, of the way in which his mother had won him by prayer, and, having won him, had consecrated and made him over to God's service, of the way in which he had been reared in the tabernacle amidst many influences for good, and many also for evil, and of the way also in which he had turned his back upon the evil influences, and followed the good ones. “Samuel, the asked of God, the granted by God, the consecrated to God, I have watched thee through thy course of docile obedience, of patient service, of devout attendance on mine ordinances; I

^c S. Luke xi. 13.

know thee by name; thou art mine." Our Christian name, the name given us at our baptism, should remind us, too, of our consecration to God by our parents in infancy, and of our spiritual history, our temptations, struggles, sins, acts of conscientiousness, acts of devotion, since that period. If we will but read the Scriptures under the guidance of the Spirit, and with a perfect willingness to be and to do all that God would have us, surely many words in them will seem so exactly to meet our wants that we shall not be able to resist the conclusion that they are addressed to us individually,—as much to us, as if God had no soul to deal with but our own,—as much to us, as if He had prefaced His message with our name, thereby waking up in our minds all the associations of our past history, and proving to us that He has been about our path, and about our bed, and hath spied out all our ways.^d

^d See Psalm cxxxix. 2, *P. B. V.*

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REALITY OF REVELATION AND THE PREPARATION FOR RECEIVING IT.

I SAM. III. 8, 9.

8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child.

9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

WHY did the Lord call Samuel four times, before He told him what He had to tell him? Why did He not do at once, as it appears He did on the fourth and last occasion—come to his bedside in a visible form, and, standing there, speak to him by name? Why call him in such a way in the first instance, as to allow him to make a mistake, and think that it was Eli who called him? We may see one or more good reasons for this.

First, the plan which God adopted was well calculated to convince both Eli and Samuel that the call was no delusion. Had the Lord come up

to his bedside and addressed him, without previous notice or preparation, the child might have imagined, when the morning came, that it had only been a dream; I mean an ordinary dream, such as happens to people in everyday life. Samuel had doubtless heard of the message of the man of God (recorded in the second Chapter), who was sent to Eli to foretell the rejection of his family from the priesthood, and the sudden death of his two sons;^a and this stern threatening message would be much upon his mind. What more natural than that he should think about it in his sleep, and that it should seem to him as if the Lord in bodily form stood by his bedside, and said to *him* very much what the man of God had already said to Eli, only in fewer words and in language a little different? This is what Eli most certainly would have thought about it, if Samuel in the morning had told him what had occurred:—"Oh, the poor child has been dreaming! He is attached to me, and he knows all about the threatening which the man of God brought me from the Lord, and he cannot throw it off in his sleep; and it seemed to him as if God had said much the same thing to him as he lay upon his bed. But that was no real message from God,—only the working of a child's mind." But, as matters were actually arranged, it was impossible to suppose that a dream was sufficient to account for what occurred. Samuel was roused from his bed three times, and was evidently wide awake and in full possession of his senses; for he answered the call, which he supposed to be Eli's, with as much coolness and presence of mind as he had doubtless shown on

^a 1 Sam. ii. 27-end.

previous occasions, when Eli had wanted help, and had really called him up in the night. When God makes any important revelation, He always gives to the people concerned some means of assuring themselves that it is indeed He who is speaking. He takes care there shall be no reasonable ground for saying that the revelation is a mistake, a fancy, a delusion. This was one of the reasons why our blessed Lord stayed on earth forty days after His resurrection,^b—to give His apostles every assurance they could desire of the fact that He had indeed risen again on the third day, as He had told them He would. He thus had the opportunity of appearing to His disciples, not once, but many times, and under all sorts of different circumstances—sometimes by day,^c sometimes by night,^d sometimes indoors,^e sometimes out of doors,^f sometimes to a single person,^g sometimes to little knots of persons,^h and on one occasion to “above five hundred brethren at once,”ⁱ sometimes to those of them who were prepared to receive the evidence of His resurrection,^j sometimes to those who, like St. Thomas, stoutly resisted the evidence.^k It was thus He gave to their reason every satisfaction as to the reality of the resurrection which it could demand.

Secondly; the call of Samuel would have failed in one of its objects, if *Eli* had not been convinced that it was from God. Eli was to be censured by it,—to be made to feel that he was passed over, and that God meant no longer to use him, the high priest, as the medium of communication with His people, but that his young pupil was

^b Acts i. 3. ^c See S. John xxi. 4. ^d See S. Luke xxiv. 29, 36.
^e See S. John xx. 19. ^f See S. Matt. xxviii. 16. ^g See S. John xx. 14.
^h See S. John xxi. 2, 4. ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 6.
^j See S. Matt. xxviii. 9. ^k See S. John xx. 27, 28.

henceforth to be the religious guide and teacher of Israel, through whose lips they should receive the knowledge of God's will. The account of Samuel's call ought to be read in close connexion with the threatening message of the man of God, at the close of the preceding Chapter. In that message God had told Eli that He would reject him and his family from the high priesthood, and would raise him up a faithful priest, that should do according to that which was in his heart and in his mind.¹ This prophecy received its *first* fulfilment in Samuel, who, although not a priest by birth, but only a Levite, yet was raised up in an extraordinary manner during the temporary suspension of the ritual and priesthood, not only to announce God's word as a prophet, but also to offer sacrifices as a priest.^m The call of Samuel was therefore the first step towards superseding Eli, and putting another and more faithful person in his room. It was absolutely necessary therefore that Eli should be assured that Samuel's call was from God, and that it was the beginning of the fulfilment of God's threatenings against himself. And how could this be done more forcibly or more naturally than by allowing Samuel to mistake God's voice for Eli's, and bringing him to Eli's bedside in unsuspecting simplicity three times in the course of the night? When the child came the third time, persisting that he had been called, Eli could no longer resist the conviction that it was a Divine call; "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child." And doubtless his conscience must have whispered to him; "This is the word of the Lord, which He spake to me yesterday by the man of God.

¹ 1 Sam. ii. 30, 35.^m See 1 Sam. vii. 9.

It is taking effect already. I was told that I should be set aside, and another placed in my room. And lo! I *am* set aside; and little Samuel is to fill the place which I have hitherto occupied."

Let us learn that God's word of threatening will as surely and certainly take effect as His word of promise. Like the word of promise, the word of threatening may not, or rather will not, be fulfilled all at once. But even now steps are being taken to the fulfilment of it, which will bring it about in its season. This act of sin leaves our hands, and seems to part company with us for a time; it drops out of mind, and we forget it. But it is running its course of mischief and sorrow, perhaps in our own experience, perhaps in that of others. It is hardening our heart, blinding our eyes, tending to fix us in a habit of sin, or tending to make others bad by the force of bad example. By and by, it will surely find us out in remorse and humiliation, and we shall return and say; "Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us."ⁿ

Lastly; there was this great object in the delaying of the message communicated to Samuel, until he had been three times called by name,—that he was duly prepared to receive the message. If God had given him the message on the first occasion of calling him, Samuel might not have known what to make of a thing so utterly new and strange to him. As it was, the child, when he crept back to his bed after the third interview with Eli, must have known what he

ⁿ Zech. i. 6.

was to expect, and must have been ready with his answer. Imagine the awe and the solemn joy too (for so good a boy must have counted it a high honour and privilege to be addressed by God) with which he lay down and listened, and after some seconds of waiting, heard the mysterious voice again, calling him twice, as if with greater urgency, and issuing not now from the holy of holies as before, but from an awful form which stood near his bed. But he knows what to do; he returns for answer the simple words which Eli had put in his mouth. And then, as God's message falls upon his ear, with what earnestness, with what wonder, with what reverence and abasement does he listen, drinking in every word the Lord spoke with all the impressibility of childhood.

If you desire to hear God's voice addressing you in the pages of His written word, you must read it with a mind and heart prepared to hear it. Take it up under the full persuasion that it is God's word. Wonder at and adore His condescension in addressing a creature such as you—so lost without direction from Him—for your instruction, consolation, salvation. Listen to it with great simplicity, and with the single purpose of acting upon all the counsel which it gives. Seek "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of"^o Christ, without whose illumination even the Scriptures themselves are as a sun-dial without the sun. You shall not long read thus without being made "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."^p

^o Eph. i. 17.

^p 2 Tim. iii. 15.

[NOTES.—p. 163, l. 11. *He returns for answer the simple words which Eli had put into his mouth.*—It appears that he left out the word “Lord,” which Eli had told him to say after “speak.” The word is “Jehovah,” the incommunicable name of God, which must not be taken in vain, and perhaps Samuel’s feelings of awe and reverence prevented his repeating it, though Eli had used it freely. The Latin translation of the Scriptures, however, makes Samuel say the word “Lord;” and perhaps he did say it; but the inspired writer, in giving the account, left it out for brevity.]

CHAPTER XXVI.

TEACH US TO PRAY, AS JOHN ALSO TAUGHT HIS
DISCIPLES.

I SAM. III. 8, 9.

8. Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child.

9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

IT is instructive to observe how Eli behaved, and what he did, as soon as he became aware that Samuel had received a call from God. He must have felt himself passed over, and that God was in fact preferring to him another person, and that person one much younger than himself; whom he had reared and trained and educated. For God's ordinary means of communication with His people at this time was by Urim and Thummim, that is, by something in the High Priest's breastplate (we cannot say exactly what it was) which enabled him to direct those who consulted him as to the path which they ought to take.^a And this breastplate belonged to the High Priest only; and none but he could give oracles by means of it. But now it was clear to Eli that, as a punishment

^a See Exod. xxviii. 30; Num. xxvii. 21; 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

of his sins, God was choosing another mouthpiece through which to address His people, even little Samuel. This must have been very mortifying and very humbling to the old man,—to have his own pupil, and (as one may say) his own child, placed before him. But for all that, he does not show the smallest symptom of wounded vanity. We do not trace the least peevishness or jealousy in his conduct. He does not turn his back upon the boy, and say; “Let God, who has called him and passed me over, teach him how to receive His own message.” But he himself teaches the boy how to behave when next he hears God’s call, and puts words of prayer in his mouth, as he had done doubtless many a time before. The fact is, Eli was a truly amiable old man. Indeed, in one sense, he was too amiable. By a weak amiability he had spoiled his sons. Better would it have been for him by far, if he had known how to be stern and severe with them, and had put them out of the priesthood for their wickedness. And now he still is amiable, when it was quite right to be so, and when it must have been a trial to be so. Surely he cannot have acted as he did on this occasion without some measure of Divine grace. For it is only Divine grace which can enable us to rise above our corrupt natural feelings. And it is not in flesh and blood not to feel a little mortification when we ourselves are set aside, and others, much our juniors, are put in our place. We may learn important lessons from Eli’s amiability, both when it led him to do wrong, and when it led him to do right. First; there is nothing which costs us so little, and yet which is so little valuable, as a reputation for good nature. We have only to let other people alone, when we

see them doing wrong, and to yield to their wishes when they want us to go with them,—we have only to be indolent, pliant, cowardly, and we at once earn this reputation. Here Eli ought to be a warning to us. His weak and foolish good nature towards his sons, letting them go on in wicked courses when he had the power to punish and to stop them, in the end ruined both himself and them.—And next; we must strive against jealousy, when favour is shown to some of our associates, which we thought we had reason to expect. Eli was not jealous of little Samuel, though it must have been very trying for him to have his own pupil put over his head. Joseph's brethren were very jealous of him, when they saw the coat which his father had made for him, and heard the dreams with which God had favoured him;^b and their jealousy led them into the dreadful wickedness of trying to get rid of Joseph altogether.^c

“Eli,” says Bishop Hall, “showed himself a better tutor than he was a parent.” Certainly he was a very valuable tutor to Samuel, if it were only for this reason, that he taught him how to pray, and put words of devotion into his mouth, to be used when God came up to speak with him. This is one of the best things which those who have charge of young people can do for them, to make them commit to memory short prayers or psalms, which may be useful to them at various periods of their future life, when perhaps they cannot get at their Bible and Prayer-book. And one of the best things young people can do for themselves is to learn by heart psalms, and texts, and hymns, and collects, so as to have them ready

^b Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4, 5, 11.

^c Gen. xxxvii. 20, 24.

against the time of temptation or trial. "Thy words," says the Psalmist, "have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."^d Oh what a restraint it is, in the hours when we are tempted to sin, to have God's word well stored up in our memory! It was when lying upon his bed at night, that Samuel used the words which Eli had put into his mouth. The thoughts of boys, when they happen to lie awake at night, are very apt to fly off to forbidden subjects, and subjects which they know to be forbidden. What a great preservative it is on such occasions, to have a prayer, or text, or psalm ready at hand for them to say, so that they may drive away the evil one. Say with great earnestness on such occasions; "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,"^e or the Collect for the sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, the prayer of which is, that having the hope of being made heirs of eternal life, we may purify ourselves even as Christ is pure;^f or the first Collect in the Communion Service; or almost any of the Psalms, and you will see what an effect it will have. Robbers, who break into a house to steal some treasure in it, run away as soon as the master of the house, awakened from his slumbers, draws his sword upon them. And when the devil, who comes to rob us of that which is our greatest treasure, purity of heart, sees that we unsheathe against him "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"^g and recite with our whole mind holy texts and prayers and psalms, he too, frightened by the glancing and flashing of that spiritual sword, takes flight from our bedside, and

^d Psalm cxix. 11.

^f See 1 John iii. 2, 3.

^e S. Matt. v. 8.

^g Eph. vi. 17.

God and good angels look down approvingly, and that promise is fulfilled to us, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."^h

But there is something more to be said on the subject of Eli's putting into Samuel's mouth the words, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." These words are a form of prayer, though a very short one. And Samuel is furnished with them beforehand, in preparation for an interview with God, which Eli foresaw that in a few minutes he would have. The words are few, but they express a great deal—a great deal of submissiveness and readiness to be guided, and a strong desire to hear and receive whatever God might please to communicate. In short, they are full of reverence and devotion, and at the same time so simple that a child may understand them. There are, unhappily, some people who sneer at the use of forms of prayer in approaching God. They think that the heart ought to speak to God freely on the spur of the moment, and as the occasion prompts. And it is quite true that we ought to cultivate the habit of lifting up our hearts to God in ejaculatory prayer many times in the course of each day,—when we feel that we have done wrong, for pardon; when we are tempted to do wrong, for grace; when we want guidance, for wisdom and counsel; when we have received a blessing, or a mercy, or an answer to prayer, giving thanks for it. And it is true also that *these* prayers and thanksgivings cannot possibly be prepared beforehand, because we cannot know beforehand what emergencies may arise to call them forth,—that they must spring fresh and free from the heart, and be couched in the words

^h James iv. 7.

which rise naturally from our lips. Ejaculatory prayer must, by the necessity of its nature, be unpremeditated prayer. But it would be wanting in reverence not to prepare beforehand for those solemn interviews with our Lord and Saviour, which we have in the public worship of the Church. And accordingly the Church of England, who is our Eli, does prepare us beforehand for these interviews. She puts into our hands a Prayer-book, with a great many forms of prayer full of reverence and devotion, the language of which is so simple that children can understand something of it, while the thoughts are so deep that the wisest philosophers and the greatest saints cannot fathom all their meaning. This is all the Church can do for us in the way of preparation: the rest we must do for ourselves. If we wish to have the full benefit of these forms, we must study them before we use them, and try to see every year something more and more of the fulness of their meaning. How brief is a single collect; and yet how full of edifying thoughts and ideas it is, containing as much matter as would make, when diluted, an extempore prayer of twenty minutes long. Let us look more and more into our Prayer-books, and we shall more and more find the forms provided in it to be like the words which Eli put into Samuel's mouth,—short, reverent, and devout,—and shall feel that they are exactly the words we want, when we draw near to God's footstool to hold intercourse with Him in His house of prayer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GOD SPEAKS TO THOSE PREPARED TO OBEY HIM.

I SAM. III. IO.

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered: Speak; for thy servant heareth.

“THE Lord came, and stood.” On this occasion, therefore, there was something more than a voice summoning Samuel from the holy of holies, as on former occasions. The voice seemed to have drawn nearer; and looking up, Samuel saw a form standing by his bedside and speaking to him. It was doubtless the form of that Angel or Messenger of God’s Covenant,^a of whom we read so often in the Old Testament as appearing to patriarchs and prophets,^b and who was in fact our Lord Jesus before His incarnation. Well would it be for all of us, if we were duly mindful that He does not lose sight of us in the hours of darkness and sleep, when we withdraw from the world’s eye. “Thou compassest my path and my lying down,”^c says the Psalmist. But in the margin of that passage you have a more exact rendering of the Hebrew word translated “compassest;” “thou

^a Mal. iii. 1.
Gen. xxxii. 24, 28, 29;
Dan. iii. 25, 28, etc.

^b See Gen. xviii. 22; Gen. xxii. 15, 16;
Judges vi. 12, 22; Judges xiii. 3, 22;

^c Psalm cxxxix. 3.

winnowest my path and my lying down," *i.e.* thou siftest me, searchest me through and through, not only while I am walking about by day, but also when I am composing myself to rest at night. If God indeed takes such strict note of us when we throw ourselves upon our bed, how very important not to omit nor yet to slur over our evening devotions,—how necessary to pray and compose the mind into such a state as will bear His close inspection!—"And called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel." So, when this same Angel of the Lord called to Abraham out of heaven, He said, "Abraham, Abraham,"^d repeating the patriarch's name twice. One second more, and Abraham would have plunged his knife into his son's bosom. Isaac's life was at stake, and therefore the call must be instant and urgent; "Abraham, Abraham." And so here. Samuel had mistaken the previous calls; he had not understood that it was God speaking to him. Now therefore the call shall become more urgent, and shall come to him in a form which does not admit of mistake; "Samuel, Samuel."—We may remind ourselves here of certain cases of persons, *not* docile and good, as Samuel was, but the very reverse, who hear God's voice in their consciences, bidding them to leave off wrong ways, or to take up some right practice which they have hitherto neglected, and who would fain persuade themselves that it is a false alarm, that what they have heard is a mere fancy or scruple, which comes of the working of an unsound mind, and try to shake it off, and rid themselves of the troublesome interference with their happiness, by plunging again into the businesses or the gaieties of the world; but the voice

^d Gen. xxii. 11.

of God (oh! great and wonderful mercy to them!) will not be so drowned; it seems to come up closer to them, and to speak in accents of greater urgency, so that it cannot any longer be mistaken, and they feel assured that, if they still refuse to listen and comply, they will be sinning wilfully and open-eyed in the face of their own clearest convictions.

Samuel, however, was not unwilling, but on the contrary most willing, to give ear to what God had to communicate to him. And the words which Eli had put into his mouth, and which he actually used, when the Lord came up and stood by his bedside, show this; "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Let us give a few moments' consideration to the words, and to what they imply. First; there seems to be in the mind of the person uttering them a desire to listen to the Lord, and to hear His voice; he bids the Lord speak. And it is quite possible that there may be in some of us a desire of the same kind. It may seem to us to have been a great privilege of God's people in old time to have heard His voice supernaturally breaking upon their ear, warning them, or guiding them, or consoling them, as the case may be; and we may perhaps indulge some regret that this privilege no longer exists, and that we cannot be partakers of it. But are we right in this notion? No doubt *miraculous* signs and wonders have ceased in our days; but can we suppose for a moment that it is impossible for us to hear the voice of God, or that He has no means of speaking to us? Has God, think you, become dumb? A dumb god is no god at all. It is said of the idols of the heathen, by way of sharp contrast with the true God, "They have mouths"

(mouths carved and painted outside to look like mouths, but not mouths that can articulate), "but they speak not."^e But one characteristic of the living God, as distinguished from the dead gods of the heathen, is that He can and does speak to His worshippers; He would cease to be a living God, if He ceased to be a speaking God. How then, and in what manner, does He speak to us now-a-days, for our guidance, direction, warning, and consolation? He speaks to us by His providence. When He sends sickness, or death, or sudden calamity, He warns us; when, without any of our own seeking, He opens to us a new line of work and duty, He guides us; when He pours out upon us many of the blessings of this life, and surrounds us with kind and sympathising friends, He comforts us. In all these circumstances we may hear His voice calling us, though in different accents, and for a different purpose. But in a still more remarkable manner we may hear His voice in His word,—that is, in the volume of the Holy Scriptures. That volume was written by inspiration of God; and when He inspired it, He must have had before Him the character and the fortunes of every one into whose hands the volume should come, and must have put in its pages some messages of warning, guidance, or comfort for each of them. And, in a still more close and personal manner, He speaks to us by His Spirit in our consciences, warning us away from sin when we stand on the brink of it; showing us by a spiritual instinct what is right and what is wrong, when we are perplexed about the path of duty, and pray to be guided by His wisdom; bringing home to us our sinfulness and need of a Saviour and a Sanctifier,

^e Psalm cxv. 5 and cxxxv. 16.

when we try to be holy and fail miserably; and, finally, giving us a glimpse into the treasures of mercy and grace there are in the Saviour whom He hath provided. And there is none of us, however young and humble, who may not in any difficulty or trouble, when he wishes for guidance, go to this gracious God and ask Him to speak to him, through His Providence, or through His Word, or through His Spirit, or through all three. God will assuredly give him all the guidance he wants and wishes for, on one condition; but that, as it is a condition very little observed, requires to be insisted on. "Speak, Lord," said little Samuel, instructed by Eli; but what warrant had a poor child to look for so high an honour? Simply, that he was prepared to do whatever God bade him. Simply, that he was listening to God as a docile pupil, ready to obey as soon as ever he knew his heavenly Father's will. Therefore he adds, "Speak; for thy servant heareth," meaning that *he heard with a disposition to do*, as if he had said, "Thy servant is quite at Thy command." The reason why persons so seldom hear God speaking, and sometimes even go the length of doubting whether He does speak now-a-days, is that they do not go to Him with a *mind prepared to receive everything He says*, and so ask Him to speak to them. When they read the Scriptures, they do not read them without a bias; they are determined to cleave to their old ways and habits of life, though the Scriptures should forbid them; and, as to their religious opinions, they have made up their mind upon those before they go to the Bible, and whatever the Bible may seem to say, they do not mean to change them. Or, if they think of praying to God for guidance

in any perplexity, they pray with some secret inclination to one line of action, or some secret aversion to another, and are not perfectly open and ready to take any line whatever which God may indicate. Let not such persons think that they shall ever hear God's voice. He is a searcher of the heart; and wherever He sees that the person who consults Him is not prepared to adopt any advice He may please to give, to what purpose should He give advice? We must go to Him with singleness of purpose, really bent upon carrying His will into effect, however hard the doing so may be to flesh and blood, if we desire the guidance of His wisdom. Going to Him so, the promise will assuredly be fulfilled to us; "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."^f God never yet was silent when He saw that He had a docile listener, one who could say to Him in truth and heart's uprightness, "Speak; for thy servant heareth."

^f James i. 5.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHY SO HEAVY A MESSAGE FOR SO YOUNG A CHILD?

I SAM. III. II, 12.

11. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

12. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

BY the "thing at which both the ears of every one that heareth it" should "tingle," I believe we are not to understand merely the judgments upon Eli and his house. Those judgments had been already very fully denounced by the man of God who was sent to Eli himself; and, in speaking to Samuel, God refers to that previous threatening against Eli, and assures the child that it shall surely come to pass. But a new and special revelation is made to Samuel, which had not been made to the man of God. God proposed to "do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that" heard it should "tingle." And in the day in which that awful judgment should be executed, the judgments already denounced against Eli should begin, and run their course along the stream of time until

they were consummated. What was this awful judgment, the very mention of which would startle and stun the hearer, like a thunderclap close to the ear? It was nothing else than what is recorded in the next Chapter, the entire breaking up of the religious establishment in Shiloh, the place where the tabernacle had been set up in the time of Joshua,^a just about three hundred years ago. It was broken up by the ark's falling into the hands of the Philistines,^b the people having foolishly and superstitiously sent for it and brought it into their camp, "that it" might "save" them "out of the hand of" their "enemies."^c In the same day in which it was taken, the judgments upon Eli and his house began to be fulfilled, by the slaying of Hophni and Phinehas in the battle with the Philistines.^d The taking of the ark was the casting off for ever of Shiloh as the place of God's solemnities, and the dissolution of the religious establishment which had grown up there. The judgment made so great an impression, that it lived very long in the memory of God's people. It is spoken of years after in the Psalms: "When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand."^e And the prophet Jeremiah, living more than five hundred years after the casting off of Shiloh, foretells that the temple of Jerusalem and the magnificent religious establishment there should share the same fate. "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a

^a See Joshua xviii. 1 and xix. 51.

^b 1 Sam. iv. 11, 17.

^c 1 Sam. iv. 3.

^d 1 Sam. iv. 11.

^e Psalm lxxviii. 59, 60, 61.

den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord. But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. . . . Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.”^f And it is remarkable that the evil threatened against Jerusalem by Jeremiah should be described in the very same terms as those used by the Lord to Samuel in predicting the evil against Shiloh. Before he broke in pieces the earthen bottle, as an emblem of the hopeless shattering of the people and city, he was bidden to proclaim as follows: “Hear ye the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, *the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle.*”^g Let us think of the casting off of Shiloh, like the casting off of Jerusalem, as a great national judgment upon the people for their abuse of their religious privileges,—the breaking up of a religious system, under which they had enjoyed special blessings,—and we shall then see great propriety in the forcible language which is used to predict it: “Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.”

But what a terrible burden was this to lay upon one so young as Samuel! God’s first communication with the child was one not of wrath only, but of overflowing wrath—such wrath as should sweep away all the religious associations in which he had

^f Jer. vii. 11, 12, 14.

^g Jer. xix. 3.

been reared, and bring desolation upon the place which, ever since he left his parents' roof, had been to him a home. Not that these particulars were revealed to him; but he was told that the judgment impending over Israel would be fearful even to hear,—how much more then to be subject to and to be involved in! Why should the Lord, one cannot help asking, sound such a thunder-clap in Samuel's ear, when first He revealed Himself to him? Had not the child been docile, obedient, pure, and devout, even in an atmosphere of impurity and profaneness? God does nothing but in love; and specially does He love those who, in the tender years of childhood, choose Him for their guide, as there is every reason to think that Samuel had done. Hence we shall surely find that this dealing with Samuel, if we look more closely into it, was a dealing in love. We may observe then that God, designing to make Samuel one of His most eminent saints and servants, begins by seasoning his heart with holy fear. He speaks to him of judgment in the first place, and tells him He is going to make him the witness of judgment upon one to whom Samuel owed much, and to whom, notwithstanding all Eli's weaknesses, his pupil had learned to look up with loving reverence. We are told that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;"^h that is, in the life of true religion it is the foundation of all that is to come after. Faith and hope—nay, and love itself—grow out of this root,—holy fear, dread of offending God, dread of incurring His displeasure and calling down His judgments. And what could more cherish this fear and dread in the heart of a very young

^h Psalm cxi. 10; Prov. ix. 10.

person, than to set before his eyes, as it were, the dreadful punishments of sin which those who are connected with him would have to undergo? It is true that the fear of God is not by any means the only feeling which actuates a religious mind, nor is it in itself a bright and pleasant feeling. But it enters into all true religion, so that without it there can be no religion. We must remember that in the sunlight there are dark colours—indigo, blue, violet—as well as bright and attractive ones—orange, yellow, red, and green. So in a really religious state of mind there is not only a feeling of hope and love, but a feeling of fear also, which restrains from sin. And we may observe further that this is the form which true religion usually takes in early life—the form of godly fear. The religion of young persons is usually a religion of restraints and restrictions, consisting mainly in a fear of doing wrong, a fear of falsehood, a fear of neglecting private devotion, a fear of swearing and using bad words, a fear of profaning Sunday. This is the natural and healthy course, and in due time will lead on to what is better,—wisdom growing out of holy fear, as the child grows in grace. And perhaps this is one thing which God designed to teach us by making His first communication to Samuel one of terror—that He prepares our minds for higher, and better, and more attractive revelations, by speaking stern language to us first, and making us tremble at His word. For awe-stricken Samuel, and tender-hearted Josiah,¹ He has nothing but grace in store.

But in addition to this general reason why God's first communication to Samuel should have been one ringing with the echoes of judgment,

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 18, 19, 20.

there may have been another special reason personal to Samuel himself. God knew the secrets of Samuel's heart, and foresaw all that should happen to him in after years. Now we are told that in after years Samuel's own sons went wrong, and that the experience of their wrong-doing was one of the reasons which led the children of Israel to desire to have a king. Samuel had made his sons judges, when he found himself too old to execute the duties of a judge himself. "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."¹ We do not read indeed that Samuel's sons profaned God's temple, or went to such excesses of wickedness and desecration as Eli's sons had done. Their sins were rather against their fellow-men than against the Lord. Still they did sin; and their sin prepared the way for the sin of the people in desiring a king. And as Samuel had made them judges, it may be presumed that he might have removed them from their office when he heard of their misconduct. May we not suppose, then, that God, in announcing to Samuel the punishment which should fall upon Eli for not restraining his sons, may have intended to warn Samuel against a sin into which he himself would be tempted to fall,—into which we may perhaps say he did fall, the warning notwithstanding, to a certain extent? How wonderful an instance is this of the truth that God, when He gives His word to

¹ 1 Sam. viii. 3, 4, 5.

the Church at large, has still the case of individual persons before His mind! He has given us the Holy Scriptures; but when He inspired them, He foresaw the trials and circumstances of every one into whose hands they should pass, and has placed some message there designed for them, which, if they read with prayer and thoughtfulness, will surely in due time find them out.

[NOTES.—v. 12. *When I begin, I will also make an end.*—These words do not quite convey the notion of the original, which in the margin is translated better, *beginning and ending*. It does not mean that God would finish the punishment of Eli's house as soon as he began it (for how then should He "judge his house for ever"?), but that, when He had once begun to perform His threatenings, He would go through with them, till they were ended.]

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOD'S APPEAL TO THE CONSCIENCE.

I SAM. III. 13.

For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth.

TO “judge” in this place means to punish,—send judgments upon. And in what he says to Samuel God refers back to the message, which He had put into the mouth of the man of God, and which had been delivered by him direct to Eli. This man of God had been commissioned to tell Eli; “There shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.”^a This cutting off of all Eli’s posterity “in the flower of their age” was the “judging for ever,” about which the Lord speaks to Samuel. Observe the word “for ever.” Eli’s posterity was to be judged or punished long after Eli’s own death,—as long as there remained upon earth any one of his descendants. Does not this show us how frightful a thing sin is, and more

^a 1 Sam. ii. 32, 33.

particularly any sin connected with the worship of God? The sin of Eli's sons was gross profaneness and irreverence in the house of God, and the scandalizing, by their misconduct, the people who came there to worship. Are there no such sins, though in a lower degree, among ourselves? And the sin of Eli was, that he allowed such misconduct to go on,—did not put a stop to it with a high hand. And this sin did not die with Eli. It lived on in its effects, so long as there was a single descendant of his upon the earth. The moment any one of his descendants was born, that moment the sin of Eli fastened on him (like a tiger pouncing out of a jungle on his prey), and did not leave him till it had cut him off in the flower of his age. Let us remember that God is a jealous God, and that sins against His ordinances and the services of His house call down a long entail of judgments upon the sinner. It is in special connexion with such sins that He proclaims Himself to be “a jealous God” in the second commandment, which forbids us to worship God under the form of an image.^b

But now let us mark the words, “the iniquity *which he knoweth*,” that is, of which he is conscious. Eli knew perfectly well that he was doing wrong in not restraining his sons. His conscience had told him again and again that he ought to summon up the moral courage to suspend them from their office, and not to allow them any longer to profane the worship of God, and disgust people with His ordinances. But over and above the warnings of his conscience, he had had a direct revelation made to him by a prophet sent from God, giving him assurance that he and all

^b See Exodus xx. 4, 5, 6.

his posterity should be severely punished for his remissness. So that here were two warnings against sin,—one in his own heart, another sent him from without in a supernatural way. And is it not the same with ourselves? Does not God give to us also a twofold assurance of what is right and what is wrong? Are we not assured by our own consciences—should we not be assured even if we had no Bibles—that indolence, greediness, impurity, cruelty, are wrong; and that, on the other hand, industry, temperance in eating and drinking, chastity, and kindness (both to our fellow-creatures and to animals) must be right? There are many heathens in the world who have never heard of God and Christ, and have never read a line of the Bible, who yet know perfectly well by the light of conscience the right and the wrong in the above particulars. And we may quite hope and believe that some of them not only have light, but walk in it,—not only know what is right and wrong, but practise what is right, and eschew what is wrong. For there is no reason to suppose that modern heathens are worse than heathens were in ancient times. And of heathens in ancient times (though he draws a most awful picture of the outrageous vices into which the worship of idols plunged them^c), St. Paul certainly seems to say that some few at all events acted up to the knowledge which they had. “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing

^c See Rom. i. 22, 23, to the end.

or else excusing one another.”^d But whatever may be the moral condition of the heathen, we, at least, are not heathen. God has brought us out of darkness into His marvellous light. He has given us a revelation in the Holy Scriptures,—in which are written down for our instruction the words of “his holy prophets, which have been since the world began,”^e and the words of His holy apostles, who are the prophets of the New Testament. And the Holy Scriptures either tell us the same things as our consciences, more explicitly and in a louder tone, or, where they do not do this, where they tell us what our consciences could never have told us, they are echoed by our consciences, so that God, in sending us His heavenly messages by the prophets and apostles, is able to appeal to our consciences, and can call on them to bear witness to His truth; “I have told him that which is in his heart and conscience he already knoweth.” Conscience is partly a light, and partly an eye. It is partly a light. It shows us what our duty is,—that we ought to be pure, honest, kind, industrious, and to avoid uncleanness, dishonesty, cruelty, and sloth. And Holy Scripture shows us the very same things, only in a much stronger and more vivid light. It entirely confirms the testimony of our conscience on the above subjects. “Fornication, and all uncleanness, . . . let it not be once named among you;”^f “Owe no man anything, but to love one another;”^g “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you;”^h “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”ⁱ

^d Rom. ii. 14, 15.^e Rom. xiii. 8.^e S. Luke i. 70.^h Eph. iv. 32.^f Eph. v. 3.ⁱ Rom. xii. 11.

But God's Holy Scriptures tell us about other and higher things than moral duties. They tell us of God's tender love for us, and of His sending His Son out of love to be the propitiation for our sins,^j and His Spirit to sanctify us and make us meet^k for His presence in glory. All this, of course, our consciences never could have told us; these precious and all-important truths are a light which our own minds never could have supplied. Nevertheless, when they are announced to us, the conscience, if in a right state, hails them gladly, and assures us that these are exactly the truths we need to make us good and happy. Conscience shows us that we are sinners; and here in the Scripture we are told of a propitiation for our sins,^l and of a Lamb of God who taketh them away.^m Conscience tells us that we are morally weak; we know perfectly well that our resolutions break down again and again, when we endeavour to be what we feel we ought to be; and here in the Scripture we are told of a Spirit who can enlighten our understandings,ⁿ cleanse our affections,^o set our wills straight, and make them strong. And this we feel to be a great evidence of the truth of what God tells us,—that it is so exactly suited to our consciences, that it so exactly meets their needs. The daylight is exactly suited to the eye, and the structure of the eye to the daylight,—so that when our eyes see the light of day, after being for a long time in the dark, they joyfully welcome it, as the wise man says; "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."^p The best eyes in

^j S. John iii. 16, and 1 John iv. 10.

^k See Col. i. 12.

^l 1 John iv. 10.

^m S. John i. 29; 1 Pet. ii. 24.

ⁿ Eph. i. 18.

^o Psalm li. 10; Acts xv. 9.

^p Eccles. xi. 7.

the world never could make sunshine ; but an eye in a right state receives the sunshine and is glad of it, and the owner of the eye feels that the light shining around him is the one condition of his eyes being serviceable. So the purest conscience in the world could never show us anything about Christ, the Sun of Righteousness ; but when Christ and His Spirit are revealed to us by God's word, our consciences rejoice in the light and gladly welcome it, and we feel that this light is necessary to our seeing all things connected with our duty and our real happiness in their true colours.

Let us make the solemn reflexion that if some of the heathen, having only a very dim light from their conscience on the subject of duty, and being unable to use their conscience as an eye at all, for lack of the light of Divine revelation, yet were actually restrained from sin and drawn to the practice of virtue by such poor light as they had, they will surely rise up in the judgment and condemn us, to whom God has vouchsafed the light both of His law and His gospel, and whom He helps by the gracious assistance of His Holy Spirit, imparted to us in our Baptism, to keep the one and embrace the other.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEARING THE SWORD IN VAIN.

I SAM. III. 13.

Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

THERE is a fine old tale in Roman history, founded in fact no doubt, although probably embellished by legends, that, after the tyrants had been driven out of Rome, and a conspiracy was made to bring them back again and set them on the throne once more, the two sons of Junius Brutus, by whom chiefly they had been driven out, joined in the conspiracy. But the conspiracy proving a failure, the young men were laid hold of, and were brought up before their father, the consul or chief magistrate of the new republic. And Brutus, it is said, hard as was the duty he had to perform as chief magistrate, did not shrink from it. With a firm voice, a cheek unblenched, and an eye from which oozed out no weak drop of misplaced compassion, he sentenced his sons to death as traitors to their country, and bade the lictors, or executioners, who carried before the chief magistrates bundles of rods swathed round an axe, to lead them forth, bind them to the stake

scourge them with the rods, and then behead them with the axe.

Did Brutus do right? Unquestionably; and in circumstances most trying to flesh and blood. The word of God is our great rule of right; and the word of God speaking of our duty to magistrates and rulers says; "If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."^a The words "he beareth not the sword in vain" probably allude to the custom of the Cæsars carrying a dagger, to show that they, as emperors, had power of life and death, which custom has come down to modern times; for our own sovereigns have always a sword carried before them on state occasions, and at their coronation the sword is at a certain point of the ceremony drawn out of its scabbard, and carried naked before the king or queen by one of the lords, in order to show that it is to be really used, that it is not a mere toy or bauble, but meant to do work with,—that it is "not" to be borne "in vain." And in the highest of all the services of our Church, in that great prayer of intercession for the Church militant here on earth, which once formed part of the prayer of Consecration, we pray that this sword may not be borne in vain by those to whom it is entrusted; for we there ask God to "grant unto" the Queen's "council, and to all that are put in authority under her, that they may truly and indifferently" (impartially) "minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice."—Brutus, therefore, in ordering his sons to be executed, did what God's will and word prescribes as the right thing for

^a Rom. xiii. 4.

magistrates to do. And yet Brutus knew not the true God, or at least knew Him not by revelation. Brutus was a heathen; he knew nothing of God's law but what his conscience and moral sense told him. He was one of those Gentiles of whom we spoke in our last Chapter, who, "not having the law," did "by nature the things contained in the law."^b And considering his circumstances as a heathen, and the disadvantages under which he laboured, in comparison of a man to whom the light of revelation *had* been vouchsafed, what he did was nearly as noble as what Abraham did, when, in obedience to the command of God, he "stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."^c

And now see the contrast in the case of Eli. Eli lived under the light of revelation, though not nearly so bright a revelation as that under which, by God's great mercy, we live. He had read God's law contained in the five books of Moses; nay he was the appointed guardian and keeper of the law; for he was High Priest, that is, the first ecclesiastical dignitary of the Jewish Church. It was through something connected with the breastplate which he, as High Priest, used to wear, that God gave answers to people who consulted Him; so that Eli must have been (if I may say so) as familiar with God as it was possible for any one to be in those times. And more than this. Eli was chief magistrate of the State as well as of the Church; for he was judge as well as priest. Now one chief part of the judge's office was, as the name denotes, to administer justice, and see that it was executed. The judge was the person who bore the sword in the

^b Rom. ii. 14.^c Gen. xxii. 10.

Jewish commonwealth. It was Eli's business, then, when there was wrong-doing in Israel, and wrong-doing of the most offensive kind, by which God's temple was profaned, and contempt cast upon His ordinances, and His people scandalized, to unsheathe the sword and strike the offenders with it, to punish his two sons, and perhaps to have them put to death. No doubt it would have been bitterly painful to him, as a father, to have done so; but Abraham, the father of the faithful, with whose history Eli was perfectly well acquainted, had steeled his heart against such feelings when God bade him offer up Isaac;^d nay, in after times, the heathen Brutus did the same, when it was his duty as a magistrate to pass sentence of death upon his sons; why should Eli, the high priest, if he must fall short of Abraham's faith and devotion, also fall short of Brutus's stern sense of duty? But alas! Eli *did* bear the sword in vain. It is true that he remonstrated, and remonstrated pathetically and very justly, with his sons.^e But God will not take words for deeds where we can give deeds. He will not accept our saying, "Lord, Lord," instead of doing His will.^f Eli smote his sons with the tongue; but this did not compensate for his not smiting them with the sword. Being judge, he did not judge *them*. And what came of it? That God judged *him*. "I will *judge* his house *for ever* for the iniquity which he knoweth." He who has authority and power to restrain men's crimes by punishment, and does not exert it, but only expostulates, makes himself an accomplice in their crimes. Might not Brutus rise up in the judgment and

^d Gen. xxii. 2, 10.^e 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24, 25.^f See S. Matt. vii. 21; S. Luke vi. 46.

condemn Eli? And might not—nay, will not—many a heathen rise up in the judgment and condemn us Christians, who being in full possession, not only of the law of God (as the Jews were), but also of the example of Christ, the atonement of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ, have left undone things which even natural conscience warned the heathen, and warned them effectually, that they ought to do. I say, “left undone.” For observe, again, that Eli’s was merely a sin of omission,—merely a leaving undone those things which he ought to have done; “He restrained them *not*.” His *own* sacred functions as High Priest he had probably discharged conscientiously. Perhaps in other cases he administered justice fairly and uprightly. But it was just this moral weakness towards his sons, which drew down the vials of wrath not only on himself but on all his posterity, and on the whole religious establishment of which he was the head. Verily God judges not of sin as man judges.

The chief lessons to be drawn from our subject are—*1st*; That to spoil children is not only a weakness on the part of the parents, but a positive sin, which may bring great mischief and sorrow not to the children only, but to the parents themselves; and further, that children will be spoiled, if parents, to save trouble or spare their own feelings, only remonstrate without actually punishing them. *2dly*; That God does not leave a man unpunished for his sins and weaknesses, because he is in the main a good man and a true servant of God. Eli seems to have been personally a good man, as he certainly was a kind and tender-hearted one; but Eli was most severely punished.

Indeed God announces this as one of His principles in inflicting chastisement: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."^s *3dly*; That people may be naturally amiable; and yet that their very amiabilities may be a snare to them, and plunge them into all sorts of spiritual mischief. It is so, whenever we allow ourselves so fondly to love relations and friends that we make idols of them, and give them some share of that place in our hearts, which should be occupied by Christ alone. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."^h We are apt to think an amiable man to be a good man; whereas an amiable man in mere natural sentiment may be a very bad man in point of principle. We find it difficult, when thinking of hell, to imagine among the inmates of that place of torment such a thing as tender natural feeling, or care for the good of others. So long as a man has these in his nature, we think he is not qualified for hell, and that therefore hell is not for him. Now I suppose that in interpreting parables, we must not press too hard upon any lesson, except the main one which they are designed to teach. And in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the main lesson clearly is, that carelessness about, and indifference to, the miseries of the poor may and does bring hundreds of well-to-do people to hell. But it is certainly a very striking circumstance that the rich man is there represented as, even in the midst of his own sufferings, caring very much for his brothers, though he had cared nothing for the poor. "I

^s Amos iii. 2.^h S. Matt. x. 37.

pray thee therefore, father," he says to Abraham, "that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."ⁱ Here then is natural affection in full play even amid the flames and agonies of hell. We can hardly be wrong in gathering this lesson from the passage, that natural amiability may exist in bosoms where there is no single grain of principle. It was not so, we believe, with Eli. For his expostulation with his sons shows clearly enough that he *had* principle. But, alas! Eli allowed his affection for his sons to carry the day over his principle. And oh how bitterly he rued it!

ⁱ S. Luke xvi. 27, 28.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE INIQUITY WHICH CANNOT BE PURGED.

I SAM. III. 14.

And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

THIS is a very difficult text. The best means of understanding it is to go back to that part of the law of Moses, in which sacrifices and offerings (that is, bloody and unbloody sacrifices) are prescribed, and to see what that says. Now the particular sacrifices at which this passage points are evidently sin-offerings,—sacrifices by which sin was in some sense purged; for the words are, “I have sworn . . . that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be *purged with sacrifice nor offering* for ever.” Let us look, therefore, at the fourth chapter of Leviticus, where the sin-offering is prescribed. The first words which meet the eye in the heading of the chapter are, “the sin-offering of *ignorance*.” And running the eye over the whole chapter, we see that the different sacrifices prescribed are in each case for sins “through ignorance.” And in Numbers xv., where mention is again made of these sin-offerings, “if ought be committed by ignorance,” “if any soul sin through ignorance,” we are expressly told afterwards that,

if the sin was *not* committed through ignorance, the guilt of it must remain upon the transgressor. "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously" (*marg.* "with a high hand") . . . "the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord," (observe these phrases, "the same reproacheth the Lord," "he hath despised the word of the Lord;" and compare with them the words in which the man of God had denounced Eli's sin, "they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed"), "and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him."^a Whereas in other cases it is said, "the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him."^b Probably the words "sins of frailty" would give a truer idea of what is meant in the original than "sins of ignorance." Ignorance in reference to sin is a very wide word. A man sins ignorantly when he has no notion that what he is doing is wrong, as when a forged bank-note or a bad coin might come into his hand, and he might pass it to another person without the smallest suspicion that it *was* forged or bad. But sins are also called sins of ignorance in Holy Scripture; when the sinner who commits them is blinded to their real character or consequence by his own sinful passion or prejudice. Eve, when she took of the forbidden fruit and did eat, sinned ignorantly; for St. Paul tells us that "the woman *being deceived* was in the transgression;"^c she really thought for the moment that the fruit

^a Num. xv. 30, 31.

^b Num. xv. 28.

^c 1 Tim. ii. 14.

would open her eyes and make her a goddess, as the devil assured her it would.^d She was very, very *guilty*, as her heavy punishment shows, for believing the devil's word rather than God's; but still she closed her eyes before she sinned; she was imposed upon. The four soldiers who nailed our Lord to the cross sinned ignorantly. From all they had heard of Christ, and from all they saw of Him in that hour (the same as what the penitent thief saw, and which sufficed to convince and convert *him*), something within must have warned them that they were doing unrighteously; but although they must have felt that Jesus was a holy and innocent man, they could not possibly have known him as the promised Messiah, or the Son of God; and therefore their act, though it was in itself the most outrageous piece of wickedness ever committed in the world, was yet a sin of ignorance; and the great Intercessor alleges it to have been so, when He prays for them; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."^e St. Paul's sin too, in persecuting the followers of Christ, was a sin of ignorance; he was blinded by fanatical prejudice in committing it, and therefore, enormous as the sin was, it was capable of being, and was, forgiven him. "I obtained mercy," he says, "because I did it ignorantly in unbelief,"^f implying that the sin was so great that, had it not been done in great measure ignorantly, he could not have obtained mercy.—We see then that in the usual language of Holy Scripture, "sins of ignorance" mean what we should rather call "sins of frailty." The moral blindness is the sinner's fault; he himself through passion or prejudice blinds and hardens

^d Gen. iii. 4, 5.^e S. Luke xxiii. 33, 34.^f 1 Tim. i. 13.

his own heart; but still it is blindness, and therefore more or less, according to the more or less of wilfulness which there may have been in it, it extenuates his action. The sins of Eli's sons, however, were not sins of frailty, but of high-handed presumptuous wickedness. They could not possibly have brought themselves by any course of corrupt reasoning to believe that rapine, extortion, and lust practised in God's sanctuary were anything but flagrant insults to the most High. They were flying in the face of Heaven when they did these things, defying God to strike them with the thunderbolts of His vengeance, and virtually saying that they feared Him not, nor cared for Him. And their father, by not punishing them when he had authority to do so, had made himself the accomplice of their crimes. And both they and their father must have had better means of knowing what was right than any one else in Israel. It is said; "the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth."⁸ Hophni and Phinehas were guardians of the law, and their duty was to teach it to others, whereas they taught others to disobey it. This was not the case of "the soul that sinneth ignorantly." It was a case of high-handed presumptuous sin. And of such sinners it had been said "that soul shall be cut off from among his people . . . his iniquity shall be upon him." And God must be as good as His word. The sins of Eli's family therefore could not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

Observe, of *Eli's family*. No mention is here made of Eli himself. The words are, "therefore have I sworn unto *the house of Eli*, that the

⁸ Mal. ii. 7.

iniquity of *Eli's house* shall not be purged." Eli's sin, we may surely hope and believe, grave as it was, did come, more or less, under the description of a sin of ignorance or frailty. His partiality to his sons blinded him, and made him lenient to their excessive depravity. His fatherly feelings led him to hope the best for them, even in the midst of their vices. He did expostulate with them (though this was by no means all that was required of him), and very probably prayed that his expostulation might prove effectual. Nay, there seems every reason to think that personally Eli was a pious and good man. As an individual he was sound at heart, though as high priest he was most unfaithful. And, no doubt, God's heavy chastisement of him was blessed and made profitable to him. The mere threat of it brought out from him that beautiful word of loving acquiescence, in which even Christian resignation may most suitably clothe itself; "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."^h And the historian in relating his death, specially and pointedly calls our attention to the fact that it was the mention of the ark of God's being taken, not the mention of his sons having met with their death, which brought his life suddenly to an end.ⁱ So that he died with God's honour sitting very near his heart. Could this have been without God's grace?

One more very awful word needs to be said. Is there any sin under the new dispensation, of which we are told that, like the sin of Eli's sons, it shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever? Truth obliges us to own that there is, though we would fain, if we might, be silent. The Apostle to the Hebrews says; "If we sin

^h 1 Sam. iii. 18.

ⁱ See 1 Sam. iv. 17, 18.

wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”^j Observe the words, “after that we have *received the knowledge of the truth.*” This then is not a sin of ignorance. It is a sin in full light, against full light. The particular sin which the Apostle had in his mind was doubtless that of apostasy, the wilful denying of Christ after being fully convinced of the truth of His claims, and having partaken of the influences of His grace. Similarly the sin of the Pharisees, which was also against the light, their ascribing our Lord’s miracles to Beelzebub, notwithstanding all the overwhelming evidence furnished by those miracles, in conjunction with His life and character, of benevolence and love, is stigmatized as sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall “not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”^k If we may hazard a conjecture on such a subject, sin of this kind cannot be forgiven, merely because it is a shutting out of that light, the admission and recognition of which is what is meant by repentance. Most assuredly no sin *that can be repented of and renounced*, however aggravated, is out of the reach of the efficacy of Christ’s most precious blood. But I doubt not that this also is true, that the more wilfulness there is in any sin, and the more it is committed in the light and against the light, so much the more does it tend to become that blindness and hardness of heart, and impenitent “contempt of” God’s “Word and Commandment,” from which we pray, as often as we say our Litany, to be delivered.

^j Heb. x. 26, 27.^k S. Matt. xii. 31, 32.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THOUGHTFUL, INDUSTRIOUS, BACKWARD TO WOUND.

I SAM. III. 15.

And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

A GOOD artist knows how to throw a great deal of expression into his drawings by a few slight strokes. It is thus that the Holy Spirit draws human character in Holy Scripture. The touches of the inspired pencil are very slight, but most expressive. How much is conveyed to us of Jehu's character, when we are told that he was a furious driver!^a And how very much is conveyed to us of Samuel's character in this verse, though it is a verse which we might rapidly pass over, as merely necessary to connect the Lord's message to Samuel with Samuel's announcement of it to Eli.

"Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision." This we can well imagine. But had not the vision itself caused him any fear? A form had stood by his bedside, upon which the child had never looked before; and from the lips of this mysterious figure had dropped upon his ear very awful and threatening words, though they were not directed against

^a See 2 Kings ix. 20.

himself. Might not this have well made even a man afraid? And Samuel was only a boy of twelve. Samuel must have known, too, that he was speaking to the Almighty God; for Eli had bidden him to answer, when he again heard his name called; "Speak, Lord," ("Speak, Jehovah,"—it is the incommunicable name of God) "for thy servant heareth." And yet he seems to have been perfectly calm and self-collected from the beginning to the end of the interview. He does not say to Eli, as one might almost have expected; "Will it not be very dreadful for me to hear Jehovah speak, now that I know it is Jehovah? Will you not let me come and sleep near you in this apartment?" But he goes back to his bed, where he knows that he shall be all alone, and when the call is again heard, and the mysterious figure approaches his bed and looks down upon him, however much his spirit may have been awed (as I doubt not it was), he is quite himself, and gives way to no foolish fears. I suppose the account of this is, that Samuel (oh happy boy!) had been so accustomed to talk with Almighty God in prayer, and to listen to the voice of God speaking to him in his conscience, that he had got over all wrong slavish fear of God, all such fear as came in with the fall, and made Adam and Eve hide "themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden,"^b and had nothing remaining in his heart but a deep thrilling awe of his Creator, which, however, instead of driving him away from God, rather drew him to God. And I can quite imagine, that to a child in this state of mind it would be not merely awful, but the most sweet and attractive and beautiful of all things to hear God speak,

^b See Gen. iii. 8.

and to have an interview with Him; that it would lift him up above common things, and make him live for the time being a higher life—a life of holy ecstasy and rapture. And if any boy will keep himself, like Samuel, pure and good in the midst of temptations, notwithstanding the bad examples around him, and will constantly practise prayer and the study of his Bible, and love and delight in attendance upon God's worship, and in uttering before our Lord Jesus Christ in His house of prayer the words which the Church, who is our Eli, puts into his mouth, it is not to be doubted but that such a boy will find Christ both in private and public prayer, and will hear Him speaking, though not to the outward ear, and feel great joy and awe in such communion, but no low disturbing fear at all.

But now mark what Samuel did, as soon as God's message to him had ended, and the figure had vanished into the night. It was a grand crisis, not only of Samuel's life, but of the history of his nation, and the child must have been more or less aware of this. Prophecy, which had been long silent, had opened her mouth once more, and designed to make the little Samuel her mouth-piece. What a flutter, what a thrill, must the prospect have made in the boy's heart! And how did he behave? In the eagerness of his spirit did he rise at once and go to Eli's apartment, and pour into his ear the heavy tidings? Nothing of the kind. He "lay until the morning." "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."^c The sun has not called Samuel to work yet; he will not rise. How then? Will he sleep? Nay, that is impossible after what

^c Eccles. iii. 1.

he has just heard. The Scripture says not "he slept," but "he lay until the morning"—lay perfectly still and motionless. "Lay"—doing what? "Lay" thinking. Oh! there was much to think of. Not only the hopeful, joyful fact that God had begun once again to speak to His people by prophecy; not only the high honour done to Samuel himself in making him the medium of these communications, but the sad, sad tidings for his old and dear master—one who, all his weaknesses and faults notwithstanding, had been to Samuel a kind master, teaching him to pray, and instructing him in the knowledge of the law and in the service of God; one, too, whom he was bound to venerate as the head of the nation, both in things temporal and things spiritual; the judge who carried the sword, and the priest who consulted God by Urim and Thummim. Oh! what a heavy office to plunge a sword into the heart of such an one, by announcing to him the dreadful doom in store for his house. God indeed never *bade* Samuel to announce it, (He can hardly have intended him to be silent, and yet He will not expressly command such an inversion of the natural order of things, as that very young people shall administer a spiritual reproof to very old ones); but Samuel feels that Eli will certainly extract from him the heavy tidings. Wherefore linger on, ye hours of darkness; lag slowly, thou dayspring from on high! Little Samuel's mind is full, and over-full. Jehovah has spoken to him, and the speech has taken possession of his spirit; he will lie awake and think. You to whom God has spoken now-a-days through some text of Scripture, or some word of the preacher, or through some warning of Providence, do the same—think!

In modern forms of religion there is a fussy restlessness, a confusion of thought between business and work, which makes them shallow and superficial. There is a vast deal of preaching among us, a great show of delivering God's message to the people, but little fruit, because there is little thoughtful listening. One sermon drives another out of the head, and no room is allowed for thought.

And when at length the day dawned, and the time of work had begun, to what work did the child Samuel apply himself? Oh beautiful trait of character, which could not have been without a large measure of grace in him! When God favoured St. Paul with extraordinary visions and revelations, there was such danger of the Apostle's being exalted above measure, that there was sent him a thorn in the flesh to keep down any undue elation of spirit^d—a stammering speech, perhaps, which made his preaching difficult to himself and disagreeable to his hearers. Here is a child, on whom the highest honour has been conferred which can be put upon flesh and blood. He has communed with God in the night; the Jehovah-Angel, the second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, has stood over his bed in visible form and spoken to him, and inaugurated, in so doing, a new era of prophecy. Priest and high priest have been passed over, in the free electing grace of God, for this little servant of the sanctuary, shortly to be made both head of the State, and (albeit only a Levite) head of the Church also. How does he receive this marvellous communication? In a way completely to justify the choice made of him by the Divine wisdom. So far from being "exalted above measure" by the vision of the night, he

^d 2 Cor. xii. 7.

turns in the morning to his ordinary daily task ; “ he opened the doors of the house of the Lord.” Samuel was a Korahite—that is, a Levite, who traced his descent from the arrogant and presumptuous Korah, whom the earth had swallowed up.^e Now the Korahites were the door-keepers of the tabernacle, as afterwards of the temple.^f It would seem as if God’s heavy judgment upon their ancestor had been laid to heart by his descendants ; for, in Psalm lxxxiv., which is called “ a Psalm *for*” (more probably “ *of* the sons of Korah”), one of these Korahites sings, in reference partly to his own office and partly to the story of Korah, from whose tent Moses had bidden the people depart,^g “ I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”^h And here is little Samuel turning in the morning, after a vision of the Lord and a direct communication from Him, to do his everyday work as a door-keeper, and to open the doors of the court, that the people might come in and worship. God has made him a prophet in the course of the night, but he is not above being a door-keeper still ; for indeed he loves the house of God, and feels it an honour to be employed in the most menial offices connected with it. Oh ! how God loves to see men or children busied faithfully in their common tasks, or in the work of their calling. Be it sheep-feeding, or washing nets, or threshing wheat, or sitting with open account-book at the receipt of custom, or opening temple doors, what grand revelations has He from time to time made to persons thus engaged, and to what honour has He raised them !

^e See 1 Chron. vi. 16, 22, 28 ; and Num. xvi. 1, 32, 33. ^f See 1 Chron. ix. 19, and 1 Chron. xxvi. 12-20. ^g Num. xvi. 23, 24, 26. ^h Psalm. lxxxiv. 10.

“And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.” Feared what? not that Eli would be angry with him. No! Eli was too kind and good an old man for that; and, besides, when Samuel knew that he himself was in personal and immediate communication with God, what had he to fear from Eli’s anger? No; his fear was, that he should give his kind old master pain—break the poor old priest’s heart, perhaps. So he lingers behind corners, and tries to get out of Eli’s way, and to escape his eye all the morning. Some people have no heart, and care nothing about giving pain to others; but I do not think they are God’s people. At all events little Samuel had a tender heart, and he had a beautiful humility, as we have seen; and he had a deep thoughtfulness, as we have also seen; and, best of all, for indeed it was the root of all, he could meet God, and speak to God, and listen to God, with joy and reverence. And all these traits of his character are wrapped up in a single verse of Holy Scripture. Can any pen, save that of God Himself, portray character with touches so few, so slight, so expressive?

[NOTES.—*v.* 15. *And opened the doors of the house of the Lord.*—The “house of the Lord” was at this time not a building, but a tabernacle or tent. This tent stood in an enclosure or court, which was curtained off. The curtains, however, must have had posts to hang upon (Eli is represented, *ch.* i. *v.* 9, as sitting “by a post of the temple”), and, as the tabernacle had now been settled a long time at Shiloh, the enclosure may have been boarded round as well as curtained, possibly for greater security against animals. There would be doors in this boarding, which it would be Samuel’s duty, as a Levite, to open and close.

p. 208, *l.* 3. The steps of Samuel’s descent may as well be given here from 1 Chron. vi. and 1 Sam. i. 1 Levi, 2 Kohath, 3 Izhar, 4 Korah, 5 Assir, 6 Elkanah, 7 Zuph, 8 Tohu, 9 Elihu, 10 Jeroham, 11 Elkanah, 12 SAMUEL.]

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

I SAM. III. 16, 17, 18.

16. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

17. And he said, What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

18. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.

“**E**LI called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son.” Samuel as we know, was only Eli’s adopted son. The child had been placed under Eli’s charge when quite young, and reared and educated by him. But, besides this, all that Samuel knew about God and His worship and His law, had come to him through Eli. The precious lessons which had been thrown away upon Hophni and Phinehas, had sunk deep into Samuel’s heart, and been treasured up in his mind; and thus a spiritual relationship had been established between him and Eli. He was Eli’s spiritual son, just as St. Paul calls Timothy “my own son in the faith,”^a “my dearly beloved son,”^b and Titus,

^a 1 Tim. i. 2.

^b 2 Tim. i. 2.

“mine own son after the common faith.”^c Thus our Lord called His disciples “little children,”^d and intimated that He stood in a spiritual relationship, far better, higher, and truer than a natural one, to all who hear the word of God and do it.^e Even very young persons may feel a bond of spiritual affinity with those who teach them valuable truth, and inculcate upon them holy lessons; and there is none of us, however advanced in age, who may not be one of our Lord’s “little children,” if only we will listen to His teaching with a docile heart, and try to put it in practice.

“Samuel, my son.” Eli’s amiable and humble character comes out as the narrative proceeds. His calling Samuel his son may seem a slight trait, but, under the circumstances, there is something very significant in it. Eli must have known perfectly well that God was setting him aside for Samuel. Eli, being the high priest, had hitherto been God’s mouthpiece to the people. Samuel now was to be His mouthpiece. Eli had been for years the head, both of the Church as high priest, and of the State as judge. Samuel was not even a priest; he was only a Levite; and in the State he was nothing at all. It had been hitherto Eli’s part to censure little faults in Samuel’s conduct. Samuel was now (as Eli’s uneasy conscience told him before the message was delivered) to be employed in threatening the grave faults of Eli with condign punishment. Under such circumstances, Eli, if he had acted from the ordinary impulses of our corrupt nature, might have become cold towards Samuel, and jealous of him, as of one who had stepped into his

^c Titus i. 4.^d S. John xiii. 33.^e S. Luke viii. 21.

own place, and thrown him completely into the shade. But Eli has too much grace in him, too much deference to God's choice of the child and God's plans for him,—in short, too much nobleness of mind and elevation of character, to indulge any such sentiments. It is still, as of old, and now in accents of most touching pathos, "Samuel, my son," my adopted one, the care and training of whom has been the one bright spot in my existence for the few last years, while they who sprang from my own loins have brought disgrace upon my name; "Samuel, my son," given to a mother's prayers in the first instance, and of whom I have nourished such bright hopes, and indulged such fond anticipations; now that God has been pleased to fulfil those hopes, let me sit at thy feet, as thou hast sat at mine, and let me hear the word of the Lord, terrible as it may be, from thy lips, as thou hast often heard it from mine.—This is indeed a noble trait of Eli, that he should say of the young Levite, whose star was in the ascendant, very much as a high-souled priest in after days said of a greater than Samuel, who was then beginning to draw all men unto Himself, "He must increase, but I must decrease."^f

Yet Eli's generosity and inextinguishable affection for the young Levite whom he had reared, is mingled in a weird way with the uneasiest apprehensions of conscience touching the things in store for himself and his house. And well it might be; for Eli must have felt not only that he had been a serious delinquent in not restraining his sons, but also that he had had his warning, and had not profited by it. This is a most important feature of the case, and must by no means be overlooked.

^f S. John iii. 30.

God, who is always reluctant to smite, never smites without warning. He lays the axe to the root of the unfruitful tree before he takes it in hand to give the final stroke.^s Eli had been warned by a prophet of the doom of death, beggary, and repudiation from the priesthood, which was hanging over his house;^h and it does not appear that in consequence of that warning he had mended. Had he summoned his sons before him, heard the evidence of the people against them, and then deposed them from the priesthood, and put them to death, or even imprisoned them, matters might have gone very differently with him. For God's threatenings are designed to have a moral effect upon the persons against whom they are directed, and are always dependent for their fulfilment upon that moral effect not being brought about. "Yet forty days," cried Jonah, "and Nineveh shall be overthrown."ⁱ Yet Nineveh never was overthrown, because Nineveh repented. Had Eli repented at the warning of the man of God, part, if not the whole of his punishment, would no doubt have been remitted. But, like many very amiable men, he was a man of no energy, an indolent man, who was for letting things take their course, and making no effort to set them square. Perhaps he whispered to himself that, though the threatening was terrible, he was too old now to reform, and by reformation to avert it. It might be well for young people to enter upon new courses, and take up new habits. As for him, whose eyesight was failing for age, it was too late. So he seems simply to have dropped the matter. Things went on in the tabernacle after the man of God's warning just as before. And in all probability a

^s See S. Matt. iii. 10.

^h 1 Sam. ii. 27-end.

ⁱ Jonah iii. 4.

considerable period, perhaps a year or more, elapsed between the warning of the man of God and the call of Samuel, during which God in longsuffering, and Eli in indolence, did nothing. And feeling that he had done nothing in the way of reformation, though God had given to him space for repentance, the worst apprehensions of his conscience are aroused, when the communication is made to Samuel without his privity. And anticipating the worst, and longing to know the worst, he solemnly adjures Samuel to keep back nothing from him; "God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee."

Samuel, so adjured, "told him every whit, and hid nothing from him." How interesting it is to trace, at every stage of the history, the development of this holy child's character. He had been called to be a prophet, that is, an announcer of God's word and will to His people. And what are the leading qualifications for the office of a prophet? First, that he should speak the whole truth fully and without reserve. He must not shun to declare unto the people *all* the counsel of God.^j And, secondly, he must speak the truth in love.^k He is not to speak it harshly or bitterly, as if glorying in the prospect of sentence being executed, but tenderly, and in sympathy.^l We have already seen how Samuel, not being directly charged by God to bear to Eli the heavy tidings he had himself received, is at first silent. He "feared to show Eli the vision," lest he should give pain to one who had shown him great kindness, and in the absence of his parents had been a father to him. So long as God does not

^j See Acts xx. 27. ^k See Eph. iv. 15. ^l See Jonah iv. 1, 2, 3, 4.

expressly say, "Tell Eli," he will keep what has passed in his own bosom. He cannot bear the thought of wounding so old and kind a friend. Here is love and sympathy. But adjured by Eli himself to let him know the worst, he tells him the very worst. No part of God's message is concealed or slurred over; he just rehearses it, as nearly as he recollects, in the same terms in which he had received it. What a fair dawn of a bright career! What a good augury of his right discharge of the prophetic office,—this fidelity combined with this sympathy!

Without saying for a moment that men may not, and do not oftentimes, turn to God in their riper years, when they have been perhaps all their youth forgetful of Him, the general rule undoubtedly is, that the character in after life retains the same shape which it took in boyhood. The boy who is selfish and untrue grows into a man who is selfish and untrue. Whereas the brave and true boy, who retains upon his heart the spell of home affection, turns out a true and high-minded man, and draws others to him by the power of sympathy. And so in the consistency of character in this life is that word of Holy Scripture fulfilled; "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."^m

[NOTES.—p. 214, l. 1. *Perhaps a year or more elapsed between the warning of the man of God and the call of Samuel.*—We are not told how long the time was. That it must have been long enough to give Eli space for repentance we may conclude from God's general

plan of dealing with men. Prophecy is not mere fortune-telling. It always has a moral object. The moral object of the message which the man of God gave to Eli, was to make Eli turn from his sin and do that which was lawful and right. God must certainly have allowed some time, to see whether Eli would act thus or not. On the other hand, that it was not a very long time, we may conclude from the fact that, in the message to Samuel, God refers to his denunciations by the man of God as if they were quite fresh in people's memories; "I will perform against Eli *all things which I have spoken concerning his house;*" "*I have told him that I will judge his house for ever;*" "*I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged,*" etc.

Indeed the appearance of the man of God, and his prophecy, must have been a most memorable event, there having arisen no prophet (with the exception of Hannah herself) since Deborah. And we are expressly told that the man of God's message was quite exceptional,—a very rare occurrence in those times; "The word of the Lord was precious in those days." So that, had it happened some months back, it would still be fresh in people's memories.]

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRADITION OF RESIGNATION.

I SAM. III. 18.

And he said, It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.

GREAT is the influence of holy example. It carries weight with it long after a man has passed away. Whether he lives in the memory of friends, or in a book giving an account of his life and character, those who come after strive unconsciously to imitate him. It was thus with the aged Eli. He both followed an example, and he set one. Aaron was his ancestor, the head of the family of the priests; and thus we may suppose that the whole history of Aaron, as given in the books of Moses, had a special interest for Eli. Now, in the tenth chapter of Leviticus, we read that Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's two eldest sons, "took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord," (it may have been common fire, not taken from the altar of burnt-offering; or possibly they may have offered incense at a wrong time, or not in the right place,) "which he commanded them not."^a The consequence was that, as they

^a Lev. x. 1.

sinned by fire, they were punished by fire. "And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord."^b This seems to have happened on the evening of the same day on which the priests had entered upon their office; and it was an awful warning of the danger of ministering in sacred things without due and deep reverence, and a scrupulous attention to all the little particulars of observance which God had prescribed. Moses explains to his brother that this was the meaning of the judgment, whereby Nadab and Abihu were struck dead. "This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."^c "And Aaron," it is touchingly added, "held his peace."^d He would not open his mouth in a murmur, although the being deprived of two sons in a moment of time, while they were transgressing God's law, and without any space being given them for repentance, must have been terribly hard to bear. From what follows, it seems extremely probable that Nadab and Abihu were not perfectly sober when they acted thus profanely; for the Lord, when drawing a lesson from what had passed, speaks to Aaron thus:—"Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations."^e Possibly Aaron's eldest sons may have been profligate and irreverent men, quite undeserving of the high honour of the priesthood, which had been conferred upon them as being his sons. And if this were so, Eli, when he heard of the judgments which were to fall upon his family,

^b Lev. x. 2.^c Lev. x. 3.^d Lev. x. 3.^e Lev. x. 9.

in consequence of the profligacy and profaneness of *his* two sons, would very naturally think how like his own case was to Aaron's, and would whisper to himself; "Now, as my sons have only too faithfully copied his, I must look to it that, when God threatens me with their death and the ruin of my family, I copy Aaron. 'Aaron opened not his mouth.' Neither will I open mine to murmur. If I open it, it shall only be to justify God, and to confess that even when He smites me, He doeth all things well; that He is righteous and wise and loving, and cannot possibly act amiss." The old proverb says, "Speech is silver; silence is golden." But does it hold good here? For my part, I am disposed to think that Eli's speech is as beautiful as Aaron's silence. At all events both signify the same thing. Aaron meant by his silence exactly what Eli expressed by his speech.

But there had been another great example of unmurmuring submission under loss of children, which Eli may have had in his thoughts. The Book of Job is supposed by most commentators to be at least as old as the five books of Moses. Now there we read of Job's saying, as soon as he heard of his having lost all his property, and of his sons and daughters having been killed by the falling of a house upon them; "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."^f Job was an Edomite,^g and not one of God's own people. It was hard, indeed, if an Israelite, and one who was high priest of God, could not equal Job in pious resignation, however crushing the calamity which was about to fall upon him and his. Eli may well have felt

^f Job i. 21.

^g See Job i. 1, and 1 Chron. i. 35, 42, 43, 44, and Gen. xxxvi. 1, 33.

this, and have been stirred up by God's grace within him to emulate such noble examples.

We were speaking just now of Aaron's silence under bereavement. There is a precious verse of the Psalms, which beautifully connects this golden silence for us with Eli's equally golden speech. And here it is that we shall see others forming themselves on the model of Eli, as he had formed himself on the models of Aaron and Job. The thirty-ninth Psalm is attributed to David. Which of David's many troubles and adversities is referred to in that Psalm cannot be said with certainty; but it has been supposed by some to have been the loss of the profligate Absalom, whom, notwithstanding all his ingratitude and undutifulness, David loved so tenderly.^h At all events, whatever the trouble may have been, David follows in the train of Aaron and Eli, for he says, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth;"—why? Now here we have the explanation of Aaron's dumbness, when Nadab and Abihu were consumed; "because thou didst it."ⁱ And the same was Eli's reason for offering no objection against God's severe dealing with Hophni and Phinehas; "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." And when driven out of his city by Absalom, and sorely pressed by his enemies, David shows the same spirit, meekly kissing the rod with which the heavenly Father is chastising him. Witness his words when Zadok, thinking to comfort him, brought the ark out of the city. If God shows him favour, He will give him again a sight of the holy tabernacle and the ark; "but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, *let him do to me as seemeth good unto him*;"^j—an echo of the very words of Eli.

^h See 2 Sam. xviii. 14, 15, 32, 33. ⁱ Ps. xxxix. 9. ^j 2 Sam. xv. 26.

Finally, Hezekiah seems to have trodden closely in the steps of Eli, when the prophet Isaiah announced to him the judgments in store for the royal house of David, the carrying away of all the treasures which they had amassed, and the disgrace and degradation of their posterity—judgments which the pride of Hezekiah's heart had contributed to draw down: "Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?"^k This resembles Eli's resignation all the more, because in both cases the judgment had not yet been experienced, and was only threatened.

One thought which arises upon these passages of Holy Scripture is, the way in which a good example propagates itself,—is handed on from generation to generation. The Apostle Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, "None of us liveth to himself."¹ Unless we live quite alone, and shut ourselves up from all society (which is the case with nobody, high or low, young or old), we cannot possibly prevent our example from spreading itself to others, whether for good or for evil. Their conduct and character must be affected by ours, either prejudicially or beneficially. Most surely, and most unavoidably, they will be either the better or the worse for having come in contact with us. You can no more live without exercising an influence, than you can live without casting a shadow. Your influence is the shadow which is cast by your mind, just as your shadow may be called an influence which is cast by the body. How very careful should this make us, lest

^k 2 Kings xx. 19.

¹ Rom. xiv. 7.

we should do harm by our example; lest our impurity or profaneness, or hardness under reproof or chastisement, should be something more than mischievous to ourselves, should reach to those around us, and make them also profane, impure, and hard.

Another thought which arises upon what has been said, is the immense value of the lives of good men, specially (of course) of those lives which are recorded in Holy Scripture, but also of all lives of those who have been in the main, with however many faults of character, saints and servants of God. Aaron's resignation was reproduced in Eli, Eli's in David and Hezekiah. Even the holiest saints of God were men of like passions with ourselves—men who were subjected to the same trials and difficulties, and conquered, through the blood of Christ and the grace of His Spirit, the very temptations to which we are daily exposed. The reading of how they overcame, and of how they succeeded in leading high, noble, generous, self-sacrificing lives, leads us to emulate their graces; and the becoming familiarly acquainted with their sentiments will, if God's blessing accompany the study, tend to produce in us the same features of character, and move us to become followers of them, as they also were of Christ.^m

[NOTES.—p. 220, l. 13. *It has been supposed by some to be the loss of the profligate Absalom.*—"Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth" (v. 5) is supposed to allude to the youth, and "thou makest his beauty to consume away" (v. 11) to the beauty of Absalom; of whom we are told (2 Sam. xiv. 25); "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." See "Greswell on the Burial Service," vol. i. p. 242. Oxford: 1836.]

^m 1 Cor. xi. 11.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHASTENING YIELDETH THE PEACEABLE FRUIT OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I SAM. III. 18.

And he said, It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth
him good.

THINGS are best shown by contrast. A white colour is never seen to be so white, as when you set it on a dark ground. The history of Samuel's early years runs side by side with the history of Eli. And it would almost seem as if the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writers of the Bible, meant to call our attention to the contrast between Eli and Samuel, and thus to bring both into higher relief. Eli was a very old man,—ninety-eight at his death.^a Samuel was, according to Josephus, only twelve years old when he was called to be a prophet.—Eli was a very weak man ; he wanted the moral courage to punish his sons. Samuel was a brave boy, who stood out against the force of bad example, and maintained his high principle, where there was every temptation to become profligate and profane.—Eli was high priest, the chief president of the Church of

^a 1 Sam. iv. 15.

Israel, whose business it was to conduct the worship of God and to teach His law. Samuel was but a humble servant of the sanctuary, able as a Levite only to execute the lower ministries, and as a child set to do the humblest of these.— Since then Eli exhibits so wonderful a contrast to Samuel, it will not be wandering from our subject, which is the consideration of Samuel's youth, if we say a word upon the general character of Eli, now that we are taking leave of him.

That character comes out brightly towards the end, like a beautiful sunset closing a day which has been overcast with clouds and black with storms. Eli's closing life is tinted with the fair colours of resignation. "It is the Lord;" said he, when the dreadful sentence hanging over his family is announced to him, "let him do what seemeth him good." These pious and beautiful words imply more than they express. For why should the fact that a sentence proceeds from the Lord be a reason for taking it quietly and cheerfully, and not murmuring against it? Why, but because the Lord is both light^b and love,^c as well as righteousness and justice? From One who, even when He punishes, is infinitely wise and loving; we may with good reason take punishment cheerfully and lovingly, knowing that the amount of it will be rather under than over our deserts. Now when God sends us prosperity, health, and friends, and a happy home, and makes everything cheerful about us, it is easy to feel and to acknowledge that He is wise and loving in all He does. But when He threatens us with heavy punishment, and is about to scourge us most

^b 1 John i. 5.

^c 1 John iv. 8, 16.

severely for our sins, and tells us plainly that there shall not be a bright spot in the future of our family, then it is only by His grace—ay, and by a large measure of His grace—that we can be enabled to say that He doeth all things well, and for the best. And this is what Eli says, when the chastening hand of God was upon him. So long as things went well with him, he had given no evidence of being one of God's true children. But the sore pressure of God's judgment upon him brings out the good in his character, which lay beneath the surface. The fragrant leaf must be crushed, before it will give out the perfume that is in it. The pebble must be cut and filed and rubbed by the jeweller, before the beautiful veining which runs through the heart of it can be brought to light.

This leaf? this stone? It is thy heart:
It must be crushed by pain and smart,
It must be cleansed by sorrow's art—

Ere it will yield a fragrance sweet,
Ere it will shine, a jewel meet
To lay before thy dear Lord's feet.^a

But the resignation of Eli to God's chastisement of him is not the only point which claims our attention in his end. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that God chastises us with a purpose. "Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."^e Eli

^a Bishop Wilberforce.

^e Heb. xii. 9, 10.

had been a bad father. He had not corrected his sons; and they doubtless took advantage of his laxity to slight his authority and give him no reverence. But, though a bad father to his sons according to the flesh, Eli proved a good son to the Father of his spirit. He gave his heavenly Father reverence; he was in subjection to Him, and showed as much when he said; "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." But more than this. His heavenly Father's chastening turned to his profit; we may see an evidence in his story that it brought him to repentance. His sin had been *putting his sons before God* (as it was said to him, "Wherefore honourest" thou "thy sons above me?"^f)—indulging his natural partiality for them to such an extent as to allow them to profane and pollute God's sanctuary with impunity. But we find, from the account of his end, that he came to a wholly different mind, and *put God before his sons*. In the next Chapter we read of the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines; of the people's sending for the ark of God from Shiloh to the camp, trusting superstitiously to its presence among them to insure them the victory;^g of their being defeated more completely than before;^h of Hophni and Phinehas, who were in attendance on the ark, being slain; and of the ark falling into the hands of the enemy.ⁱ Meanwhile Eli, we are told, was full of apprehensions for the ark of God.^j He probably had never consented to its being taken out of the tabernacle, away from his own guardianship: but it was the national will to have it in the army, and he, an old man near upon a hundred, must

^f 1 Sam. ii. 29.^g 1 Sam. iv. 4.^h 1 Sam. iv. 10.ⁱ 1 Sam. iv. 11.^j 1 Sam. iv. 13.

yield. So he "sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for *his heart trembled for the ark of God.*"^k And when at last the messenger came to Shiloh with the bad news, and told him of the defeat of the people, and of the numbers they had lost, and of the death of his sons, and of the capture of the ark,^l this last particular broke his heart, and he dropped from his seat and was killed by the fall. "And it came to pass, when he made mention"—not of the defeat of Israel, not of the death of Eli's sons, from his undue partiality for whom his heart had now been weaned, but—"when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy."^m The ark of God, the centre of God's worship, the symbol of God's presence, the representative of God's ordinances, the repository of God's law, was nearer to his heart now than those sons whom he had once so criminally indulged. He loved God now more than son or daughter, and felt grieved not so much for his domestic loss as for the spiritual bereavement which God's Church had sustained. So our Archbishop Whitgift, when he was paralysed and his speech affected, could be heard to say nothing distinctly but this; "Pro Ecclesiâ Dei," "Pro Ecclesiâ Dei," ("For the Church of God"). The Church of God was nearer to his heart than his own troubles and approaching death.

Thus beautifully does Eli, in extreme old age, fall asleep. Severely had God scourged him, as He scourged Jacob, as He scourged David, as He scourges every son whom He receives.ⁿ He will

^k 1 Sam. iv. 13.^l 1 Sam. iv. 17.^m 1 Sam. iv. 18.ⁿ Heb. xii. 6.

have us know that if we sin, we shall certainly smart for it in time, even if by repentance and faith we escape through grace the eternal penalty; and that the smart shall be none the less, because the sin is one of what is called natural amiability, and consists in setting our affections too fondly and partially on some one to whom we are bound by the ties of the nature. But we shall have reason to bless the smart, if it leads to spiritual healing, if "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."^o This it did to Eli. He was received after he had been scourged,—received, we may trust, into the bosom of the Father, to whose wisdom and love he had resigned himself so meekly, and there consoled with an eternal consolation.

[NOTES.—*p.* 227, *l.* 28. "The king sat by his bedside, and the archbishop attempted to speak to him in Latin; but neither the king nor any of those who attended him, understood what he said, except his last words, 'Pro Ecclesiâ Dei,' 'Pro Ecclesiâ Dei.' With hands lifted up again and again, he reiterated 'Pro Ecclesiâ Dei.' The king, to whom he had often spoken of his duty as a nursing father of the Church, was visibly affected, and remained long by his bedside."—*Hook's Archbishops of Canterbury*, vol. v. (New Series) p. 184.]

^o Heb. xii. 11.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CHILD'S GROWTH THRICE NOTED.

I SAM. III. 19.

And Samuel grew.

“AND Samuel grew.” These words, following as they do the account of the call of Samuel, show us that he was quite young at the time of his call. It would never be said of a person grown-up that he grew. Josephus tells us that Samuel was twelve years of age, when he first prophesied. This doubtless was the tradition of the Jews on the subject, which had been handed down to the days of Josephus. And doubtless it was a true tradition. When a child reached the age of thirteen, it was thought by the Jews that he became subject to the whole law, and particularly to the rule of going up three times a year at the great festivals, to worship God in the place of His appointment. We find however that our blessed Lord was thus brought up to Jerusalem by His parents, when He was twelve years old;^a and we may reasonably infer from this that children unusually advanced in intelligence and character were made sons of the Covenant, and

^a S. Luke ii. 42.

admitted to the privileges of full Church-membership, at a rather earlier period. And it is surely very remarkable that the story of our blessed Lord's interview with the doctors in the temple, and of the astonishment which the listeners felt at his understanding and answers, should be immediately succeeded by the words, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,"^b just as here the account of Samuel's intercourse with God in the tabernacle, and of his call to be a prophet, is succeeded by the words, "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." It seems as if different holy men of old were figures of our blessed Lord, not throughout His whole career, but in some part of His character and work; and that Samuel was a figure of Him in His childhood,—that Samuel dwelling under the shadow of God's wings as a child, Samuel visited by his mother in the courts of the tabernacle, Samuel called by God at twelve years of age to be a prophet, Samuel after that call increasing in wisdom and stature, was a shadow projected beforehand of a holy Child to come, who should be the pattern Child of all children, and through whose graces of character the light of the Eternal Godhead should shine.

But when we are told that "Samuel grew," we must understand that he grew not in stature only, but in wisdom and grace. And we must remember that we have had two mentions of his growth before, which we may now look back upon, and ask what we are meant to learn from them. The first mention of it occurs immediately after the notice of his mother's yearly visits to him, when she brought him the little coat, to wear

^b S. Luke ii. 52.

under his ephod.^c Eli, having found the child useful, docile, and devout, "blessed Elkanah and his wife," and promised them repayment of "the loan which is lent to the Lord"^d (a repayment which the historian tells us by anticipation was made in due season); and then it is said, as an additional evidence that God's blessing was resting on Samuel's consecration; "and the child Samuel grew before the Lord."^e—Then follows the account of the wickedness of Eli's sons, and of their persistence in it notwithstanding the remonstrance of their father;^f immediately after which is introduced another notice of Samuel's growth; "And the child Samuel *grew on*, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men."^g

It might seem at first sight as if *this* notice of Samuel's growth were out of place, being in no way connected with what precedes or follows. But surely there is a deep connexion, which a little thought enables us to perceive. And this is it. The depravity of Eli's sons, and the way in which they slighted their father's remonstrance, must have been a fearful trial to little Samuel. Well might his mother feel, in leaving him among such companions as Hophni and Phinehas, that she had thrown him into the lion's jaws. At some periods of the history even of the Christian Church, it has been said with only too much truth; "The nearer the church, the further from God." And assuredly little Samuel could nowhere have been in greater danger of moral contamination than in the courts of God's tabernacle, where these wicked priests profaned the house of God, and

^c 1 Sam. ii. 19.^d 1 Sam. ii. 20.^e 1 Sam. ii. 21.^f 1 Sam. ii. 22-26.^g 1 Sam. ii. 26.

scandalized every one by their evil lives. But by God's fortifying grace, Samuel stood firm against the evil examples which met his eye, and was not in the least tainted by them, but remained (a miracle of grace indeed) pure, devout, simple-minded, docile, reverent amidst it all. And the Lord, seeing his young will thus stedfast, and his heart thus pure, granted him, as it were, to make a fresh start in godliness and wisdom, poured down upon him the dews of His Spirit in such abundance that he "*grew on*" before the Lord, and according to the promise made to those young persons who forget not the law of their parents, but whose "heart" keeps their commandments, found "favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man."^h—And now again, at twelve years of age, when Samuel becomes subject to the whole law, when he is old enough to be honoured by converse with God and by the prophetic call, when God comes close up to him, and calls him thrice by name, and stands over his bed, it is again said for the third and last time; "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." He was beginning his life's work in earnest; and God gives him to make a fresh shoot in godliness and wisdom, under the influence of that Spirit, to whose guidance he had been so faithful.

How forcibly all this reminds us of what should be the course of the Christian child, of what *is* his course when he is true to baptismal grace. He is brought to the font in infancy, and there with the prayers of the Church, represented by those who bring him, solemnly consecrated to God. Nor is he consecrated in vain: The Spirit of God, who in the first creation moved upon

^h Prov. iii. 1, 4.

the face of the waters, to bring gradually out of the chaos the fair structure of the universe,ⁱ hovers over the laver of regeneration,^j and pours His blessing upon those who are washed in it. An infant cannot present any obstacle to the grace of God, as an adult who approaches Baptism without repentance and faith may. And accordingly we believe that the infant is made partaker of that grace; for it is altogether incredible to us that Christ should by His minister take a child up in His arms, and bless it, and give it the outward visible sign of spiritual cleansing, without really washing it in the blood and water which flows from His pierced heart. The infant then receives grace in this early dedication of it, and grows before the Lord until consciousness developes within it, and after consciousness conscience, and the perception, through mother's teaching, of the difference between right and wrong. And then the bias of the will shows itself. Children, when still quite young, may be faithful or unfaithful to the guidance of God's Spirit in such matters as saying prayers, resisting greediness, selfishness, indolence. Then comes the schoolboy life, with all its severe trials, with all the knowledge of wickedness which is sure to be instilled in the course of it, and with all the enticements to vice, and all the temptations to be ashamed of right feelings and right conduct, which it is sure to bring with it. Will a boy stand his ground in the midst of such temptations? Hundreds of Christian boys do not. Samuel, with comparatively a dim knowledge of God and God's ways, did stand his ground in a trial of this sort infinitely more severe, inasmuch

ⁱ See Gen. i. 2.^j See Titus iii. 5.

as it was not from his schoolfellows, but from his superiors, and those to whom he was bound to look up, that the evil example and influence proceeded. And Samuel, standing proof against the temptations which beset him, made a vigorous shoot in wisdom and goodness, and won the favour not of the Lord only, but also of man.^k And so will it be with every boy who faithfully copies Samuel; he will not stand still; the baptismal dews, still fresh upon him, and not brushed off by coarseness, selfishness, or profaneness, will be a principle of holy growth in wisdom and in grace.

But there is another period of growth and vigorous shooting in store for such children—ay, even for those who in their early childhood may *not* have responded as they ought to have done to the grace of God. It is the period of Confirmation, when Christ comes by one of the chief pastors of His Church, and stands over them with holy hands, and makes an urgent personal call to them to enlist under His banner, just as life is opening upon them with its many responsibilities and trials. From this holy rite, duly and reverently prepared for, and received with devotion and earnest prayer, many have dated their first hearing of God's voice, and the first settlement of their resolution to live as servants of Christ. They have followed it up, not fitfully and irregularly, but continuously and habitually, by the receiving of that blessed Sacrament, which is appointed for the strengthening and refreshing, as Baptism is for the quickening, of the soul. And they have found in this Sacrament the means of repairing the decays of the spiritual life, and of

^k See 1 Sam. ii. 26.

making it strong, healthy, and vigorous. And so they have gone on since the time of their Confirmation, making progress on the whole in the spiritual life, though not, it may be, without backslidings and relapses. It will be so with you, young reader, if you regard the holy rite not as a charm which will act without your giving your minds to it, but as a means of grace to be carefully prepared for by thought and prayer, and a great opportunity of hearing God's voice closely addressing your own conscience and calling you by name; and if you surrender yourself to Him when He so calls, body, soul, and spirit, with the words of Samuel; "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WORDS WHICH TAKE EFFECT, AND THE WAY TO SPEAK THEM.

I SAM. III. 19.

... And the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

WHEN it is said that "the Lord was with" Samuel, we are meant to connect the words with what has gone before them in the narrative, and with what comes immediately afterwards,—with the vision which Samuel had seen in the night, and with his establishment to be a prophet. The same words are used, in other parts of the Old Testament, of those servants of God to whom it pleased Him to make remarkable revelations, or whom He raised up as prophets and deliverers. Thus, when God appears to Moses in the bush, and sends him to deliver Israel out of Egypt, He says to him: "Certainly *I will be with thee.*"^a And to Joshua after Moses's death it was said, "As I was with Moses, so *I will be with thee.*"^b And when the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, who was raised up to deliver Israel from the Midianites, He said to him, "*the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.*"^c And to the Virgin Mary, who was to be God's instrument

^a Exodus iii. 12.

^b Joshua i. 5.

^c Judges vi. 12.

for bringing into the world the world's Deliverer, the angel Gabriel said, "*The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*"^d In short, we find that this is a form of salutation generally used in greeting those to whom messengers are sent, or messages come from heaven. It is quite in keeping with this, that when Samuel is first established as a prophet of the Lord, and God sets up a new order of things in Israel, of which Samuel is to be the head, it should be said "the Lord was with him."

But more than this. God specially approves of *youthful* piety. And therefore in cases where such piety has been shown, we are told emphatically of the persons showing it that the Lord was with them, and that they prospered in consequence. Thus of Joseph, who resisted temptation in his youth, it is three times said that "*the Lord was with him, and*" (it is added) "*that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.*"^e And of young David, when he was sent for from the sheepfold to soothe Saul by playing on the harp, and behaved himself wisely under the trying circumstances in which he was placed at court, it is also said three times that "*the Lord was with him.*"^f In this other use of them, the words suit admirably the case of Samuel. From his earliest childhood he had been a holy God-fearing youth,—one who, like Joseph, had kept himself pure in an atmosphere of severe temptation, and, like David, had taken delight in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and, though favoured by God, had behaved himself wisely and modestly.

It is said of him then, with the utmost pro-

^d S. Luke i. 28. ^e Gen. xxxix. 2, 21, 23. ^f 1 Sam. xviii. 12, 14, 28.

priety, that "the Lord was with him, and," it is added, "did let none of his words fall to the ground." This means that all his prophecies proved true in the end, as Saul's servant says of him in the ninth Chapter of this Book, "All that he saith surely cometh to pass."^g And of his *first* prophetic words coming to pass, we have a record in the next Chapter to that upon which we are now engaged. For Samuel's first prophecy was of the ruin which should overtake Eli's house and the whole religious establishment in Shiloh. And in the beginning of the fourth Chapter we read how the Israelites joined battle with the Philistines, and were defeated with great loss, and how Hophni and Phinehas were slain, and the ark was taken. And all the prophetic words which Samuel uttered were like this first one. Each of them flew to its fulfilment as certainly and unerringly as an arrow or bullet flies to the mark at which it is aimed.

Thus it is of the words which Samuel spoke by inspiration of God, not of his ordinary conversation, that mention is here made. Yet we may usefully remind ourselves that there is a sense in which we should all of us endeavour that none even of our most ordinary and commonplace words should fall to the ground. Our Lord has very solemnly warned us that "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."^h An idle person is one who does no good work. And an idle word is one which is useless, and furthers no good object, which does not contribute anything to instruct, or inform, or cheer, or encourage, or innocently amuse either ourselves or other people,—a

^g 1 Sam. ix. 6.

^h S. Matt. xii. 36.

word which does fall to the ground, and runs utterly to waste, as far as any useful purpose is concerned. If "the Lord is with" us by His Spirit,—ever present to our thoughts during the day; if we are enabled to realize Him as walking side by side with us in the journey of life, and to lift up our hearts to Him from hour to hour in acts of adoration and thanksgiving, of resignation and dependence, then undoubtedly our mouths will be more or less under restraint from our hearts, and we shall seek and pray and strive to make *all* our words good and useful—kind, sincere, encouraging, instructive, or entertaining, even when they cannot be at all about religious subjects.

But there is another application which we may make of the passage before us to the words which we utter *in prayer*. How many such words seem to fall to the ground, to have no effect whatever on our hearts and characters, to be attended with no result! Of course we cannot expect that God will always give us the worldly and temporal good things we pray for, such as health, or a better position in life, or larger means, or the life of our friends. Such things He might not see to be really for our good. But how is it that our prayers for *spiritual* blessings, even when offered at the most solemn times, such as the celebration of the Holy Communion, seem to fall to the ground, and to miss of their effect? Chiefly, I suppose, because we do not offer them in faith and hope and love, and so do not apply the key, which alone can unlock God's treasure-house. We do not really believe that we receive the things we pray for. We have no lively expectation of receiving them. We are selfish, and do not pray for others; possibly, even while we pray,

we nourish some secret grudge, which we are not quite willing to put away. In a word, "the Lord is" not "with" us when we pray, moving us by His good Spirit to great thoughts of His own power and love, to great expectations from Him, and to kind, loving, sympathizing, generous thoughts of the people around us. If He were thus with us in the deep of our hearts, no word of prayer which we uttered could possibly fall to the ground,—each word must sooner or later be accomplished.

And this is taught us most beautifully in our Morning and Evening Service, though in a part of it which is very little understood or considered. At that turn in the Service, when we pass from praise to prayer,—from the Creed, which we ought to recite in a spirit of jubilant thanksgiving, to the "Lord, have mercy on us," with which our supplications commence,—seeing that those supplications will fall to the ground unless the Lord be with us in offering them, the Minister is directed to pronounce with a loud voice this short benediction, "the Lord be with you;" and the people, who, being members of the Christian Church, have a share in the priesthood no less than the Minister, are directed to give their benediction in answer to his; "And with thy spirit." Then immediately follow the "Lord, have mercy upon us," Lord's Prayer, Suffrages, and Collects. Now, in order fully to understand this mutual salutation of the priest and people, we must be aware that it was a salutation of common life, which harvesters among the Jews gave to one another as a kind of blessing on the harvest they were gathering in. Thus we find Boaz, in the Book of Ruth, saying to the reapers at work in his field, "The Lord be with you. And they answered him,

The Lord bless thee.”¹ And in Psalm cxxix., where mention is made of “the grass upon the house-tops which withereth afore it groweth up: wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom,”^j it is noticed as a characteristic of this fading, withering grass, that it had not received the harvester’s blessing; “Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.”^k

Now all prayer is a sowing of seed which, if it be duly sown and duly watered with the rains of heaven, shall bring forth a harvest in due season. But prayers sent forth by those with whom God is not, whose spirits God is not stirring to the confidence of faith, the anticipations of hope, the sympathies of love, will and must infallibly fall to the ground—the saying of them is as the scattering of seed upon hard, shallow, or thorny soil, which will bring no fruit to perfection. How necessary is it then that before we address ourselves to Common Prayer, we should mutually, priest and people, ask the Lord to be with us, to be in the midst of us, making His presence felt and realized, and touching our spirits with that faith, and hope, and love which alone can secure a result to our prayers. And if we attached more importance to that brief mutual salutation, and said it with more fervour and spiritual intelligence than at present, how might it change the complexion of the supplications and intercessions which follow it, and make them fruitful of effect, both in our own experience, and in that of those, whose wants no less than our own we are directed to represent at the throne of grace.¹

¹ Ruth ii. 4.^j Ps. cxxix. 6, 7.^k Ps. cxxix. 8.¹ See 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROPHETICAL OFFICE IN SAMUEL'S PERSON.

I SAM. III. 20.

And all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.

DAN was in the extreme north, and Beer-sheba in the extreme south, of the promised land. The words therefore, "all Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba," mean the whole nation, even in the remotest districts, as one might say of a thing generally known throughout England; "It was known from Northumberland to Cornwall."

"All Israel knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet." They knew it by the fact of his words coming to pass, by the fulfilment of all the prophecies which he spake in the name of the Lord. Just as the fame of our blessed Lord's miracles spread abroad throughout the whole country, so that, when He came into the remotest parts of it, His fame had gone before Him, and, on one occasion, a poor Syrophenician woman came out of the borders of Tyre and Sidon, a heathen district, to ask His help for her daughter ;^a

^a S. Mark vii. 24, 25, 26.

so, although in those old and troubled times intelligence travelled very slowly and uncertainly, and communication between one part of the country and another was difficult and tardy, the name of Samuel was known everywhere throughout Israel as that of a man who had an insight into the future, and indeed into hidden and secret things generally. Thus, when Saul was searching for his father's asses, his servant told him that Samuel was in the neighbourhood (which shows that the common people must have known Samuel's movements), and that he, by his supernatural knowledge, could guide them to the place where the asses had strayed.^b It is instructive to observe that when Samuel was consulted on this question of merely private concern, while he showed that he was quite able to answer such a question, by assuring Saul that the asses were found, and that he might make his mind easy about them, he at the same time spoke to him of the kingdom which was waiting for him, and of the throne which God had summoned him to fill.^c God will not have His holy prophets thought of as mere gipsies or fortune-tellers, who can only guide us in our small private concerns. He would let us know that they can direct public affairs, and foretell events of national, and indeed of universal, interest.

“All Israel knew that Samuel was *established* to be a prophet.” In those Bibles which have marginal readings (and the marginal readings greatly increase the value of a Bible, because in many places they throw great light upon the meaning of a text), you find the word “faithful” given as an alternative translation of the word

^b 1 Sam. ix. 6.

^c 1 Sam. ix. 20.

“established.” Both translations are worthy of being received and considered. Samuel had proved “faithful” to the Lord. He had been faithful as a child, before he was called to be a prophet. He had been a conscientious, high-principled boy—one who, in obedience to the movements of God’s Spirit in his young heart, had resisted the influence of evil example around him, had profited by Eli’s instructions in the law, and had become day by day more reverent and devout. Again, he had been faithful in delivering the first communication which was made to him by God touching Eli and his house. Though, out of tenderness to Eli’s feelings, he would not tell him what had passed without any call to do so, yet, when solemnly adjured to do so by the aged priest, “Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.”^d And accordingly God judged him to be faithful, and honoured him by making him the founder of a new state of things—a succession of prophets regularly educated and trained to act as a kind of national conscience to His people, guiding them in their perplexities, checking them when they were on the verge of wrong-doing, and reproving them for their sins. And it is because Samuel was the first founder of the order of Prophets, that St. Peter, in the third chapter of the Acts, speaks of “all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken.”^e Prophecy, considered as an institution, dated from Samuel. It was a great honour which God put upon his faithfulness. We are here reminded of a greater than Samuel, even the apostle St. Paul, who tells us in his First Epistle to Timothy, that “Christ Jesus counted” him “faithful, putting” him “into

^d 1 Sam. iii. 18.^e Acts iii. 24.

the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but" (he adds), "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."^f And again, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks of himself as "one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful."^g Even before his conversion, St. Paul had been in a certain sense "faithful," although under a miserable and monstrous delusion, which led him into the most grievous sins. He was faithful to his conscience and his convictions, for he could say before the high priest and the council; "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."^h It is, however, chiefly after his conversion that St. Paul is said to have been "faithful." When convinced of Christ's claims, he immediately opened his mouth to preach Him at Damascus, in spite of the storm of persecution stirred up against him by doing so. And in his subsequent ministry, let us hear his protestations of his faithfulness; "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."ⁱ God, therefore, looking into his heart, and judging him to be faithful, made him not an apostle only, but the apostle of the Gentiles, and through his preaching principally "caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world."^j

But now let us look for a moment at the word "established." We are to understand from it that, amid all the confusion and disorder into which the laxity of Eli, and the wickedness of Eli's sons, had plunged the affairs of the nation, God was now going to settle in the person of Samuel a new

^f 1 Tim. i. 12, 13.

^g 1 Cor. vii. 25.

^h Acts xxiii. 1.

ⁱ 1 Thess. ii. 4.

^j Collect for the Conversion of St. Paul.

order of things. Prophets there had been long before Samuel; for Zacharias, the father of St. John the Baptist, in his song of thankfulness and praise, tells us that the mighty salvation which should in due time be raised up for Israel in the house of God's servant, David, had been spoken of "by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."^k But the prophets hitherto had appeared occasionally and intermit- tently, and at uncertain intervals; and latterly there had been a long pause. Samuel's mother indeed had prophesied; but between her and De- borah, who was the last prophetess before her, there had been an interval of one hundred and thirty years. Now Prophecy was about to open its mouth again, and to open it in a regular manner. Samuel was not only to prophesy him- self, but to provide for successors to the pro- phetical office. He was to found schools of the prophets,—colleges, that is, where young men might be trained for the prophetical ministry, instructed in sacred learning, and practised in devotional exercises, especially in psalmody and music. We find Samuel presiding over one of these religious assemblies at Naioth in Ramah, when Saul sent messengers to take David, who had fled thither for shelter; and that the spiritual influences which were abroad in these assemblies were strong and overwhelming, and laid hold even of indifferent or hostile visitors with a giant's grasp, we may judge from what is recorded on that occasion; "And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon

^k S. Luke i. 70.

the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied."¹ Let us learn that, when Divine worship is performed in an orderly and at the same time a spiritual manner, many persons at once lifting up their hearts in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, there is a sacred infection in it which is irresistible, and which lays hold sometimes even of those who do not scruple to express contempt for such things, so that they who came to scoff remain to pray. This was the manner and order of Divine worship which, when Shiloh was destroyed, the ark of God taken, and the regular ministrations of the tabernacle suspended, Samuel instituted in Israel. St. Augustine tells us that in the first days of his conversion, when the services of the Church were comparatively strange to him, so deep an impression was made upon his feelings by the order and fervour exhibited in them, that he used to be bathed in tears.

Let us end this meditation by reflecting how close a connexion there is between being "faithful" and being "established." It is only by faith, that is, by living, working trust in God—in the Father's love, in the Son's grace, in the Spirit's power—that any one of us can be strong or established, either in his own inner life, or in any work which he does for God. The settlement of any soul upon the Rock of Ages is by faith. The settlement of any institution in the world, its becoming great, and strong, and useful, and doing a good and great work, is dependent upon the amount of faith which is embarked in it. Faith is the stablishing principle both of souls and of institutions. There is nowhere any strength without it.

¹ 1 Sam. xix. 20.

“Be strong” (“strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might”^m), “and he shall *establish* your heart: all ye that *put your trust* in the Lord.”ⁿ

[NOTES.—*p.* 247, *l.* 19. *He used to be bathed in tears.* —“How much wept I in those days” (the days immediately succeeding his baptism) “at Thy hymns and spiritual songs, being touched to the quick by the voices of Thy Church, when she made such sweet melody! Those voices flowed into mine ears, and with the melting strains the truth was shed abroad in my heart, and thence a deep sentiment of devotion surged up within me, and the tears ran, and those tears—how good was it for me to shed them! It was not long since the Church of Milan had begun to solemnize services of consolation and exhortation after this manner, the brethren singing and making melody with great fervour both in their hearts and with their voices.”—(*Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book ix. ch. 6.) He mentions the same emotions further on (Book x. chap. 33), where however he expresses a doubt whether in elaborate musical strains there may not be something too sensuous, and whether Athanasius’s mode of reciting the Psalms (probably a monotone with the fewest and simplest inflexions) was not on the whole more suitable.]

^m Eph. vi. 10.

ⁿ Psalm xxxi. 27, *P.B.V.*

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BLESSEDNESS AND THE MEANS OF RECEIVING COMMUNICATIONS FROM GOD.

I SAM. III. 21.

And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

WE are told, in the first verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that "God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets."^a And in the verse before us the historian seems to refer to these "divers manners" of communications from God; for he says that "the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh *by the word of the Lord,*" as if there were other ways in which the Lord might and did reveal Himself. Observe, too, the connexion between the former and latter part of the verse; "the Lord *appeared* again . . . for the Lord *revealed himself* . . . *by the word of the Lord.*" It is as much as to say that revelation by the word of the Lord carried with it some appearance to the outward eye. And here a distinction, which we find in old Hebrew writings, comes in to help

^a Heb. i. 1.

us. The Jews reckoned up four degrees of Prophecy or Divine Revelation,^b only one of which they said remained under the second Temple. The first they called *Prophecy* (in the limited sense of the word): it was a revelation of God's will by means of visions and apparitions. The second they termed, *the Holy Ghost*, which was when a person prophesied *without* visions and apparitions, as they say David and Job did. The third was *Urim and Thummim*, an oracle given to God's people through the high priest, and in some mysterious way connected with his breast-plate. The last they called *Echo*; it was a voice falling from heaven which declared the will of God. And we know that a voice from heaven bore witness to our Blessed Lord on three several occasions: once at His Baptism,^c again at His Transfiguration,^d and a third time when, in the prospect of His death and passion, He prayed that God would glorify His own name, and was answered by a voice from heaven, which some took to be thunder, and others to be an angel speaking to Him.^e It was evidently in the first of these four ways that the Lord's will was made known to Samuel. For, as we have before noticed, it is implied in the account of his call that God appeared to him in a visible shape; for we read that "the Lord *came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel,*"^f which can only be understood of a form drawing near to and standing over his bed, by which his name was uttered. And in the verse before us the revelations made to Samuel are expressly connected with appearances. "The

^b See Godwyn's *Moses and Aaron*, Book iv. ch. 8 [London, 1655].

^c S. Matt. iii. 17.

^d S. Matt. xvii. 5.

^e S. John xii. 28, 29.

^f 1 Sam. iii. 10.

Lord *appeared* again in Shiloh: for the Lord *revealed himself* to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord." It should be added that this verse which closes the Chapter, and with which we close our consideration of Samuel's childhood, is to be connected with the opening verse, and set against it in way of contrast; "And the word of the Lord was precious in those days" (that is, rare, infrequent, casual); "there was no open vision." But now (such is the implication of the verse before us), after a long period of silence, God again commenced His communications with man, and carried on those communications regularly, Samuel being himself "established" as "a prophet of the Lord," and providing for a succession of prophets after him (as we saw in our last Chapter) by founding schools or colleges, where young men might be trained for the prophetic ministry.

The reflexions which suggest themselves on what has been said are as follows:—

1. What a dreary hopeless state it is to live without any communications from God! Man did never in fact live entirely without such communications; for the moment after he fell, and in the course of the sentence which was passed upon the serpent who seduced him, a comfortable, cheering, hopeful promise was given of a certain Seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head,^s that is, crush the devil, and destroy his power. But four thousand long weary years had to run out before this promised Seed should come; and unless God had often revealed Himself to man during those years, and made frequent communications to him, the hope of relief by the

^s Gen. iii. 15.

promised Seed would have died out of man's heart, and he would have sunk into the depth of despair. God *did* reveal Himself "at sundry times and in divers manners," sometimes dropping His communications for a long tract of time, but always renewing them again, so that there cannot be said to have been any age of the world without a prophet, as Zacharias intimates in his song; "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."^h

It has indeed been said by doubters and unbelievers that God has given man a conscience and a moral sense, which speak to him in God's name, and teach him what is right and wrong, and that this is quite a sufficient communication from God to make us good and happy, and that we need nothing further. But what is it that our conscience, which is indeed the voice of God within us, teaches us first and before all things else? It is that we have gone astray from the rule of right, have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and have done those things which we ought not to have done. Conscience is a judge which condemns us, and tells us we have deserved punishment. And though it also shows us (to a certain extent) what we ought to do, it gives us no sort of assistance in doing it. No man, without some better help than conscience lent him, ever lived fully up to the requirements of his conscience. So that the knowledge which conscience gives us is something like the knowledge which Adam and Eve gained by eating the forbidden fruit: "their eyes were opened, and they knew"—well, knew what? What grand discovery had they made in consequence of breaking God's

^h S. Luke i. 70.

precept? rather a dismal one, it must be confessed—one which thoroughly disgraced them and put them to shame in their own eyes, but gave them no hint as to how they might escape from the disgrace—"they knew that they were naked."¹ Naked people want clothing; but there was no opening of the eyes as to where clothing was to be had. And those who have lost the garment of original righteousness (as we all have), and whose consciences tell them that they cannot answer God to one charge of a thousand, need a righteousness not their own to cover them, and a strength not their own to keep God's law for the future. And of such a righteousness and such a strength their conscience gives them not a single inkling. The knowledge of this can only come from God's revealing Himself by the word of the Lord, from His holding out to them hope, and opening to them a ray of light, by messages from heaven. Oh! let us all bless Him from the ground of our hearts, that when man had fallen into the pit of destruction, He did not leave him without such messages, but spoke to him at sundry times and divers manners, seeking to bring him back to Himself in penitence and faith.

2. But again; "God revealed himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord." We may justly reflect that He has done this more completely to ourselves than He did to Samuel. "The word of the Lord" has two meanings in Holy Scripture. Sometimes it means the Personal Word of the Lord, that Word of which we read in the first verse of St. John's Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity. Sometimes it means, as in the verse before us, the

¹ Gen. iii. 7.

word which was spoken by Prophets in the Old Testament, or by Apostles and Evangelists in the New, and which has been committed to writing, and has come into the hands of all of us under the name of the Holy Bible. But in truth these two senses of the phrase "word of the Lord" resolve themselves into one. "God," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, "who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." His Son is darkly predicted and shadowed forth in the Old Testament; clearly announced and brightly revealed in the New. And He is the sum and substance of all Revelation. All human hopes, duties, privileges, are wrapped up in the revelation of Christ. Acceptance, guidance, strength, all is given to us in Him, in His blood, in His law, in His Spirit. It cannot be said of any other founder of a religion, as it may be said of Christ, that he himself is the religion which he founded.

Now, do we each one of us practically act as if we fully believed that constant revelations from God were necessary to make us holy and happy? Do we make daily devout use of the Holy Scripture, which is our great means of receiving revelations, or, in other words, communications from God? Possibly our secret thought respecting our private devotions is this,—that prayer indeed is all-important, and cannot be dispensed with, but that the devotional study of the Holy Scriptures, though very desirable and advantageous, is not a matter of prime concern. And, in a similar manner, in Public Worship, all good people are anxious to attend to the prayers, but make very little conscience of listening to the sermon. But

I would just ask whether you do not think it equally important to our holiness of heart and life, that God should speak to us, as that we should speak to God. In prayer we speak to God. In His word (read or preached) God speaks to us,—having somewhere in that word a message specially designed for us, which, when we read or listen devoutly, will surely find us out. This, then, shall be our last lesson, (not now inculcated for the first time in this little book) from the history of Samuel's childhood,—that we should take up our Bibles daily, and pray over them that God would reveal Himself to us therein “by the word of the Lord,” sending us some message of bright encouragement or solemn warning, which may help us in meeting and conquering our temptations, which may fix the eye of our minds more steadily upon “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,”^j thus cheering us in running “the race that is set before us,”^k and enabling us so to run that we may obtain.^l—Amen.

[NOTES.—p. 250, l. 13. *The last they called Echo; it was a voice falling from heaven which declared the will of God.*—Lightfoot has some very interesting remarks on this fourth method of Divine Revelation called *Bath-kol* (or daughter of a voice), for which he has very little respect, thinking that the accounts of such voices, which are frequently given by the Talmudists and later Rabbins, and said to have been general under the second Temple, are either fictions, or that the phenomenon was the result of magical and forbidden arts. He thinks that the *Bath-kol* of the Talmudists has nothing whatever to do with the voices which fell from heaven at our Lord's Baptism and Transfiguration, and on the occasion of the Greeks seeking to see Him. *Bath-kol*, he says, did not seem to come from heaven. The voice from the holy of holies, which was heard shortly before the destruction of the city by the

^j Heb. xii. 2.

^k Heb. xii. 1.

^l See I Cor. ix. 24.

Romans, saying, "Let us depart hence"* was an instance of *Bath-kol*; but this voice *did not fall from heaven*. *Bath-kol*, if there is anything in Holy Scripture like it, resembles rather the voice which called Samuel; but this voice seemed to the child, *not to fall from heaven*, but to *proceed from Eli's apartment*. As for the genuine Scriptural "voice from heaven," he says that instead of being the latest and poorest, it was one of the earliest and most dignified forms of Divine Revelation, granted before the Law (see Gen. xxi. 17; and xxii. 11), and at the giving of the Law; "out of heaven *he made thee to hear his voice*, that he might instruct thee" (Deut. iv. 36); and *after that never vouchsafed again till the Baptism of Christ*. He also explains the name *Bath-kol* (daughter of a voice) in a singular way. He tells us that the oracle Urim and Thummim was given by a voice which issued from the mercy-seat; and that when Urim and Thummim ceased, *Bath-kol* made its appearance as a sort of substitute and successor. Hence the latter voice might be called, he thinks, the daughter of the former. (See Lightfoot, *Harmonia Quatt. Ev.*, on St. Matt. iii. 17; and *Horæ Hebraicæ*, *ibid.*)

But why may not the daughter of a voice mean an *echo*, which is awakened from certain spots by a voice? The idea would be that God speaks from heaven; but His voice is, in *Bath-kol*, caught up and echoed from some spot on earth, generally from His temple. This might well have been the case in Samuel's call; and it might have been the case also with those awful accents, which were heard from the holy place, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. That voice is not indeed recorded in Holy Scripture; but it may well be believed to have been a real voice of Almighty God. Doubtless a great many things which Talmudists and Rabbins have said of *Bath-kol* are mere superstitious fables, worthy of no credit. That is no reason why there should not have been a genuine and authentic *Bath-kol*. Where forged coins are passed, you may be sure there are such things as good coins.

P. 253, l. 21. *When man had fallen into the pit of destruction, He did not leave him, etc.*—In Bishop Andrews's "Private Prayers" for Friday occurs this noble Act of Praise, derived from one of the ancient Liturgies, with which I gladly close the volume:—

"O Good One, who, when man had transgressed thy

* See Josephus, *Wars*, Book VI., chapter v. sect. 3.

commandment and fallen, didst not despise nor forsake him, but visitedst him at sundry times as an affectionate father, granting unto him thy exceeding great and precious promise concerning the life-giving seed, and opening to him the door of faith and of repentance unto life; and who, in the fulness of the times, didst send thy Christ himself, to take upon him the seed of Abraham, and by the oblation of his life to fulfil the obedience of the law, and by the sacrifice of his death to endure its curse, by his death to redeem the world, and by his resurrection to quicken it; Thou who doest all things to bring back our race unto thyself, so that it might be made a partaker of the divine nature, and might obtain eternal glory; Thou who gavest testimony to the truth of thy gospel by many and divers miracles, by the ever-memorable conversation of thy saints, and their admirable endurance of torments, by the marvellous conversion of the whole earth to the obedience of faith without the aid of arms, eloquence, or power; Blessed, praised, celebrated, magnified, exalted, glorified, hallowed be thy name, the remembrance, the mention, and every memorial thereof, both now and for ever.”]



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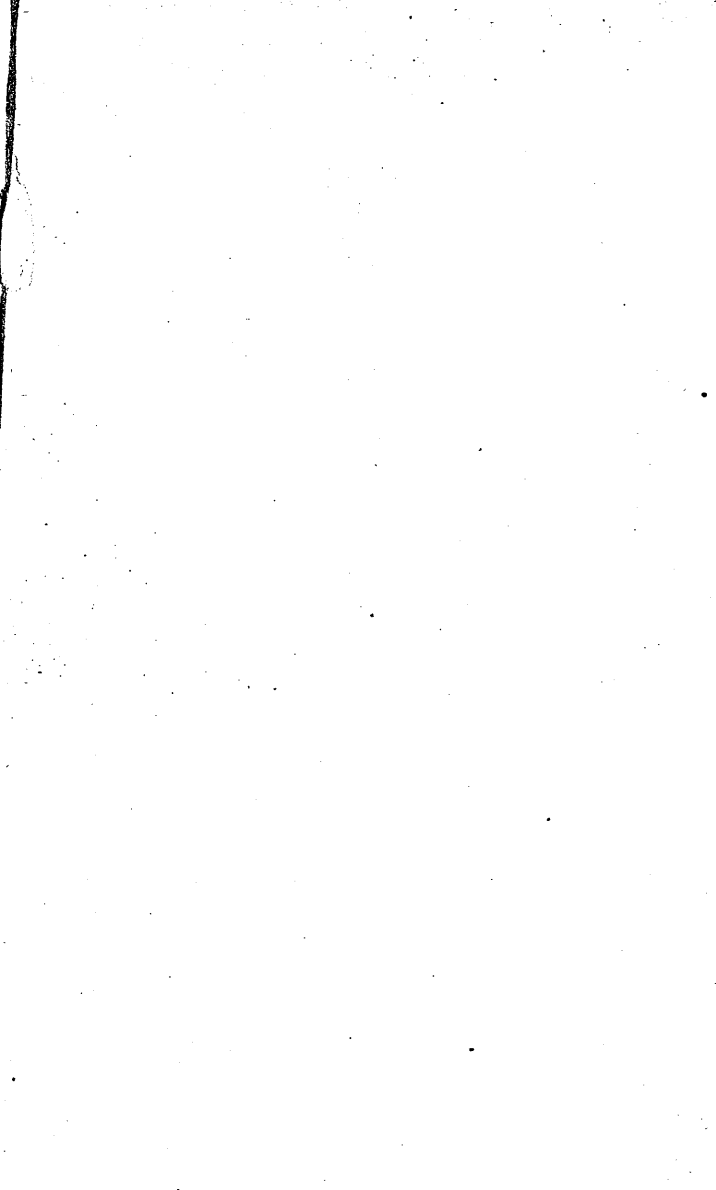
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